



Robert Klein Joins AARC To Launch National COPD Awareness Campaign

(NAPSA)—Robert Klein is best known for his stand-up comedy performances on late-night talk shows and HBO Specials. But his message to Americans is no laughing matter.

Beginning today, Klein officially kicks off a national awareness campaign with the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. COPD, a lung disease caused primarily by smoking, afflicts more than 30 million Americans and is the fourth leading killer disease in the United States.

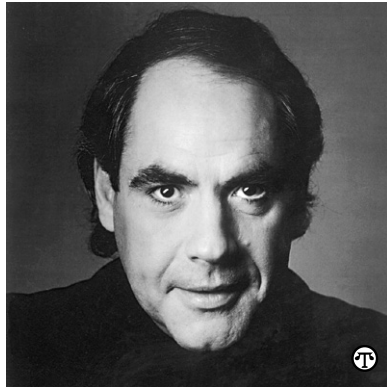
During the campaign, Klein will travel to several cities across the United States promoting awareness for the signs and symptoms of COPD to help sufferers identify their illness and seek treatment. One element of the campaign the AARC hopes will make a great impact on patients is a public service announcement featuring Klein, which will begin airing in the fall.

Klein, who began his stand-up comedy career in 1963 performing in smoke-filled clubs across the country, was diagnosed with COPD nine years ago. Of the estimated 30 million Americans who suffer from the symptoms of COPD, only 16 million have been diagnosed. Although Klein's COPD symptoms are mild and he remains in good health, he is lending his experience and name to raise awareness of this illness, which in many cases can be devastating.

"I'm a smoke-oholic and I hope other smokers and former smokers will be able to relate to my experience and find help, just as I did," explained Klein, who is currently working on a movie with Hugh Grant and Sandra Bullock. "I started smoking in high school and have fought this habit ever since, going periods of one, five, seven and 11 years without smoking."

It was in the 1960s that Klein's cigarette habit grew to two packs a day.

"Everyone smoked back then," said Klein, who became aware of a constant cough in his early 40s. "I just accepted the cough as a result of the smoking. That was my mistake."



Comedian Robert Klein is helping raise awareness of a common lung disease.

Although Klein didn't know it at the time, his persistent cough was the first symptom of COPD.

He wasn't diagnosed with COPD until 1993, after he had quit smoking for more than six years.

"It was during a routine physical when my doctor, a pulmonary specialist, was concerned about my cough and had me take a spirometry test," Klein said. "He asked me to blow into this machine, which tested my lung function.

"He showed me the dials and explained how everyone loses lung function as they age, but this was beyond that. I had a greater loss because of my former smoking habit. Then, he had me take two puffs of some medication in an inhaler and asked me to do the spirometry test again. I did it, but I didn't think there would be any difference. I was quite surprised to see a 20 percent improvement."

Dr. Kelly Greene, a research pulmonologist from National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Denver, says Klein is like many COPD patients who have quit smoking.

"The day Robert Klein noticed that cough would have been the best day for him to call his doctor and report his symptoms," said Greene, who added the first signs of COPD often are a constant nagging cough, excess mucus production or shortness of breath while walking or exercising. "Unfortunately, the information about COPD wasn't available to Robert at the time.

"Smokers or former smokers in

their 40s who notice those symptoms should visit a physician or pulmonary specialist who can easily diagnose the symptoms and recommend the best treatment to help them breathe easier."

In mild to moderate COPD, anticholinergics are recommended as first-line maintenance therapy. For Klein, his physician prescribed Combivent® (ipratropium bromide and albuterol sulfate) Inhalation Aerosol.

Combivent provides patients consistent control through the anticholinergic component and rapid relief from the beta-agonist, all in one single inhaler. Combivent is indicated for use in COPD patients who are using a regular aerosol bronchodilator but continue to have evidence of bronchospasm and require a second bronchodilator. The most common side effects of Combivent treatment are dry mouth, bitter taste and headache.

"The medications available today, in conjunction with smoke cessation, are very helpful to COPD patients," Greene said. "Our goal is to make COPD patients aware that help is available."

Klein considers himself fortunate to be in relatively good health, fully able to maintain a vigorous work schedule. He strives to maintain healthy lungs through his medication and regular workout sessions. However, he freely admits he still battles the desire to smoke.

Further information about COPD, including full prescribing information for Combivent Inhalation Aerosol, is available on the Web site www.thebreathing-space.com.

The AARC, headquartered in Dallas, is a professional membership association of respiratory therapists which focuses primarily on respiratory therapy education and research. The organization's goals are to ensure that respiratory patients receive safe and effective care from qualified professionals and to benefit respiratory health care providers. The association continues to advocate, on behalf of pulmonary patients, for appropriate access to respiratory services provided by qualified professionals.