



WOMEN'S HEALTH

The New Women's Health Epidemic: Chronic Bronchitis And Emphysema

(NAPSA)—In the mid 1960s, the famous advertising tagline “You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby” made smoking a symbol of women’s progress. What followed was a decade-long peak in cigarette smoking among women. While fewer women are smoking today, the legacy of that era continues to reverberate with the rise of a new women’s health epidemic: COPD.

COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, is a progressive condition that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Primarily a disease of current and former smokers, it’s one of the leading causes of disability and death in the United States. Just as women’s smoking rates caught up with and surpassed men’s in the 1960s and ’70s, so too has the incidence and burden of COPD in women mushroomed over the past few decades. Once affecting men and women equally, chronic bronchitis and emphysema now affect more than 8 million women, compared to 4 million men.

Today, women experience more emergency department visits, hospitalizations and—for the first time—deaths than men as a result of COPD. From 1980 to 2000, the death rate for COPD among women in the U.S. approximately tripled, and in 2003 more than 63,000

The Facts About COPD

- More than 60 percent of those diagnosed with COPD are women.
- For the last four years, more women have died from COPD than men.
- Female smokers are nearly 13 times as likely to die from COPD as women who have never smoked.
- An estimated 898,000 women visited an emergency room for COPD in 2000, compared to 673,000 in 1992.



women died from COPD, compared to 59,000 men. In fact, that same year, more women died from COPD than from breast cancer.

“The impact of COPD is alarming and it’s clear that many women with the disease may be paying the price for the marketing campaigns of the last century,” said Dr. Patricia Tietjen, chief of pulmonary medicine at St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York. “We need to move away from the shame and blame associated with the cause of COPD, and focus on getting women diagnosed and the appropriate treatment they need so they can lead more manageable lives with this condition.”

Understanding COPD

COPD is characterized by a loss of lung function over time. Unlike

asthma, COPD is associated with a cascade of decline that leads to a diminished quality of life. The most common COPD symptoms include shortness of breath, chronic cough with or without phlegm (“smoker’s cough”) and wheezing. The early signs of COPD—shortness of breath on exertion and coughing—are often incorrectly attributed to getting older or being out of shape. COPD is often associated with exacerbations of these symptoms.

COPD is underrecognized and undertreated. While there are 24 million Americans who have impaired lung function, only 12 million people have actually been diagnosed with the disease.

COPD is, however, a manageable disease. According to diagnosis and treatment guidelines set by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), intervention can help improve and prevent some of the symptoms of COPD and improve health status and patient outcomes.

“With a combination of lifestyle changes and medication, COPD patients can help improve their daily life,” said Tietjen. “I urge women with the symptoms of COPD to see their doctors and discuss treatment options.”

For more information, visit www.COPDinfo.us.