

How to cope with pain of asthma

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

For some asthmatics, getting out of bed, walking into the bathroom and brushing their teeth is a problem. For others, suicide is the route taken when the respiratory disease becomes terribly debilitating. And still others live day-to-day trying to keep an eye on the things in

their life — allergies, cigarette smoke, stress, perfume — that could trigger an asthma attack.

"It is a very confusing and confused illness," said Bruce Dubin, a physician. "For some people this disease changes the whole family dynamics."

To help families with asthmatic members manage the disease and cope with the changes it brings in life, Dubin and Carol Vick, a respiratory therapist, have been offering a free educational program to area residents since September. The program has been sponsored in conjunction with Botsford General Hospital's department of health promotion.

"The concept is not brand new," said Margo Gorchow in Botsford's health education department. "But what we are doing is unique because we are doing it through the school system." Since September, Dubin and Vick have met with parents and their children in the Farmington, Livonia and Redford Union school districts.

EACH MEETING has been devoted to topics that are considered important to the asthmatic and their families, Gorchow said. Geared for children ages 5-13 and their parents, the program has been dealing with a spectrum of topics that

are of concern to asthmatics, Gorchow said.

Some of the topics discussed have included what triggers asthma, available medications, hospitalization and the emotional results of the disease.

"A good treatment program isn't just treating the patient," Dubin said. "It's helping the whole family."

We try to give family members and patient a feeling of consumerism. The program is designed to get patients to take an active role in treatment and therapy. We teach people to be involved."

The program is also designed so the parents and the children are separated

during the meetings. While the parents have been meeting with Dubin, the children worked with Vick, Gorchow said.

"As health education, the goal was helping patients understand their disease and their role and responsibility in treating it," she said. "The program is helping them see they are the ones who help and treat their own asthma."

Both Dubin and Gorchow say the program so far has been successful. "Some of the parents say their kids have opened up and talk about it (asthma)," Gorchow said.

The program teaches the kids to recognize the things that could trigger an asthma attack, what to do when they do have an attack, how to live with the disease and how to be assertive and demand, for example, that someone put out their cigarette, Gorchow said.

The program also offers parents and kids ways of treating the disease without always relying on drugs, she added.

SOME OF THE RESULTS of the program have included an awareness in the children of when they are about to have an attack so they can tell someone about it before it happens, Gorchow said.

Although the public in general often fails to realize the seriousness of asthma, Dubin said, there's no doubt it is a chronic disease that is fairly common in children and appears to be on the increase in the United States.

"Its onset can be at any age," Dubin said.

Asthma is actually "lurching lungs," he said. When a person has asthma the lungs are "a million times more sensitive" than those of a person who does not have asthma, Dubin said.

"It's very frightening. The lungs tighten up and there is a feeling that you can't breathe," Dubin said. "Sometimes it can be very mild and sometimes it can kill people."

But it's more than a feeling of not being able to breathe. The lungs of an asthmatic become so hyperinflated with air it's impossible to get a breath in or out.

"It's very real that people cannot breathe," Dubin said.

And if the bronchial tubes tighten enough, a wheezing sound can be heard. An increased production of mucous can also result.

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Brighton director joins association

Ivan C. Harner, the executive director of Brighton Hospital, has been admitted to membership in the Association of Mental Health Administrators, a professional association for administrators of agencies and programs serving emotionally disturbed, mentally ill, mentally retarded and developmentally disabled individuals, as well as those individuals with problems of alcohol and substance abuse.

Brighton Hospital specializes in the treatment of alcoholism and related chemical dependency and each year treats more than 1,000 patients, most of whom reside in southeast Michigan communities.

AMHA confers the Certificate of Certified Mental Health Administrator only after its Committee on Credentials has reviewed evidence of acceptable employment, educational achievement, high moral character, ethical conduct, and participation in hospital and health-related association activities and civic affairs.

In addition to his role as executive director of Brighton Hospital, Harner serves on the board of directors of the Visiting Nurse Association of Huron Valley and was recently elected to a two-year term on the board of directors of the Boys and Girls Club of Ypsilanti.



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