New procedure helps patients with severe asthma breathe easier

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Nearly 24 million people in this country suffer from asthma. For most of them, avoiding allergens and taking medications help keep their asthma under control. But for a small group with severe persistent asthma, frequent hospital visits tend to be the norm and taking medications and lifestyle changes don't do the trick. Northwestern Memorial Hospital is now using a new procedure called bronchial thermoplasty (BT), the first non-drug therapy approved by the Federal Drug Administration, for patients with severe asthma.

"This procedure is for patients who, despite receiving high levels of asthma medications, continue to suffer from asthma attacks," said Colin Gillespie, MD, pulmonologist and director of interventional pulmonology at Northwestern Memorial. "BT offers these patients a way to control their disease."

BT is a simple, minimally invasive procedure. It's performed in three different parts, and each time a different section of the lung is treated. BT is designed to be an outpatient procedure. The Boston Scientific Alair® Bronchial Thermoplasty System delivers heat energy to the airway of the lungs; reducing the excessive muscle, which decreases the ability of the airway to narrow. This helps reduce the amount of asthma attacks.

"Asthma affects many people in this country, and often is undertreated by physicians," says Ravi Kalhan, MD, pulmonologist and director of the asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) program at

Northwestern Memorial. "The bronchial thermoplasty procedure offers our patients with severe refractory asthma an option that may improve their quality of life. This is an important addition to the available therapies for this common condition."

In a clinical study, adults with severe asthma that were treated with BT had improved quality of life.

- 84% reduction in emergency room visits for symptoms of asthma
- 73% reduction in hospital visits for symptoms of asthma
- 66% reduction in lost days from work, school, or other activities due to asthma
- 32% reduction in asthma attacks

Provided by Northwestern Memorial Hospital

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