

Home-based pulmonary rehabilitation: More freedom for COPD patients

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Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is the fourth leading cause of death in Canada. Although it is an incurable chronic disease, effective treatments exist to relieve symptoms and improve the course of the illness.

The latest study by Dr. François Maltais of the Hôpital Laval, institut universitaire de cardiologie et de pneumologie de Québec and Dr. Jean Bourbeau, of the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) proves the effectiveness of home-based pulmonary rehabilitation and provides new insight into improving care services. The study will be published in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* on December 16th.

Home-based pulmonary rehabilitation: an effective and safe alternative

Pulmonary rehabilitation is currently the most effective treatment available to improve shortness of breath, effort tolerance and the quality of life of patients suffering from COPD. "Our results prove that home-based rehabilitation is just as effective and safe as that provided in hospitals," states Dr. Maltais. "What's more, it is a real benefit to patients in comparison to a strictly pharmacological treatment."

In spite of its obvious benefit, only two per cent of COPD patients in Canada are offered this treatment because health care facilities do not

have the means to offer it in-house. In half of the regions of Québec, pulmonary rehabilitation is not even offered to patients.

The home-based program designed by the Canadian researchers is based on aerobic exercises and can easily be performed alone. This helps to ease the burden on hospitals, while continuing to provide optimum care. This major study involved more than 250 patients in 10 Canadian centres.

Towards a new health care system organisation?

"We hope that this study will lead to the reorganization of the system so that as many patients as possible will be able to benefit from the program," Dr. Bourbeau explains. "Its widespread implementation could have a major positive impact both on the public's health and on the health care system."

In addition to the economic beneficial interest of home-based treatment, the physical condition of patients improves to the point where they no longer require as many hospital visits. This program could therefore help to reduce expenses.

This program reflects the current trend of involving patients in the management of their chronic illnesses. Education, accountability and making healthier lifestyle choices have a positive impact on most chronic illnesses, including COPD.

Source: McGill University

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