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New heat therapy treatment helps asthma patients breathe easier

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University of Rochester Medical Center doctors who care for people with severe, uncontrollable asthma have introduced a new therapy to make it easier to breathe. Bronchial Thermoplasty reduces asthma symptoms by delivering low heat to the source of the problem – the smooth muscle of the airways – and URMC pulmonologists are the first in the region to provide this new procedure.

"This is an exciting step forward in the treatment of severe asthma," said Sandhya Khurana, M.B.B.S., of URMC's Mary Parkes Center for Asthma, Allergy and Pulmonary Care. "Bronchial Thermoplasty can dramatically improve the quality of life for people who struggle with chronic asthma symptoms."

URMC performed its first procedures in April and patients are recovering successfully. Bronchial Thermoplasty is an FDA-approved, non-drug therapy for patients whose asthma symptoms are not well controlled with standard medications.

"We are delighted to share this new therapy for asthma with our patients and their families though the upstate region," said Patricia Sime, M.D., F.R.C.P., chief of Pulmonary and Critical Care and director of the Mary Parkes Center.

Longtime asthma sufferer Debra Maclennan is pleased to see inhalers sitting idle on the countertops in her Canandaigua home, since undergoing the new procedure. "Life is definitely much better. My

breathing tests went way up, which was beautiful," she said. The inhalers and other breathing treatments were lifelines for her previously.

Maclennan was diagnosed with asthma in 1992. The disease progressed and she struggled to work and complete simple chores or tasks without coughing uncontrollably. Her primary care physician Susan M. Landgraf, M.D., of Thompson Health Family Practices, and pulmonologist Khurana were out of treatment options for the severe disease.

About asthma

The lungs are made of multiple airway passages surrounded by smooth muscle. For people with asthma, this smooth muscle is more susceptible to triggers and irritants that can cause it to constrict and reduce the amount of air that flows through the lungs. As a result, people with asthma experience shortness of breath and wheezing.

As many as 22 million Americans suffer with asthma, resulting in nearly a half-million hospitalizations and 1.8 million emergency room visits each year. Asthma is the most common chronic illness in childhood, accounting for 12.8 million missed school days each year. It also contributes to 10.1 million lost work days for adults.

Asthma symptoms can often be managed with inhalers or oral medications. Yet that isn't enough for some people with severe asthma that is not well controlled with steroid inhalers or oral medications and they suffer progressively worsening symptoms.

The Alair Bronchial Thermoplasty System allows doctors to use a bronchoscope to insert a small catheter directly into the lungs and deliver controlled energy. This reduces the amount of smooth muscle in the airways and its ability to constrict the airways, thus quelling asthma symptoms.

Khurana and a team of asthma experts including Michael Nead, M.D., Ph.D., and Michael Larj, M.D., perform the outpatient procedure on adults whose asthma cannot be managed with standard medications. The treatment is delivered over three visits, scheduled three weeks apart and each treating a different area of the lungs. The procedure is performed using moderate to deep sedation. Patients are expected to experience fewer symptoms from asthma flares after completing all three procedures.

All patients being considered for this procedure undergo evaluation in the severe asthma clinic at the Mary Parkes Center. Located at 400 Red Creek Drive in Henrietta, the outpatient center is the region's leader in care, research and education. It serves children and adults with asthma, other lung disorders and allergies, providing innovative care in a compassionate environment. For more information, call (585) 486-0147.

Provided by University of Rochester Medical Center

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