A message from the guest editor

COPD: Applying practical approaches to diagnosis and management

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is a common preventable and treatable disease. When it comes to managing and treating patients with COPD, medications and nonpharmacological interventions both need to be part of the plan.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 15 million people in the United States have COPD. With worldwide figures growing as well, the World Health Organization has projected that COPD will become the third most common cause of death in the world by 2030.

With these health statistics in mind, the goals of COPD management include improving lung function, preventing disease progression, relieving symptoms, improving exercise tolerance, preventing exacerbations, reducing complications, minimizing adverse effects from treatment, and reducing mortality.

By having a clear understanding of the diagnosis of COPD and the treatment mechanisms available, physicians can better communicate with their patients to help them achieve these goals.

There also are a variety of nonpharmacological interventions that are important, if not critical, when managing COPD patients. Smoking cessation, proper use of medications, pulmonary rehabilitation, diet and surgical interventions are all part of care plan options for treating patients with COPD.

Furthermore, patients with COPD should be educated about their disease and how to properly use their treatment devices. To reduce exacerbations, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits, patients should have an action plan in place and a case management resource to assist as needed.

In this issue of AOA Health Watch, I have partnered with Samuel L. Krachman, DO, and Fredric Jaffe, DO, FCCP, to discuss practical approaches to COPD diagnosis and management. Both physicians are noted experts in the field of pulmonology.

In the first article, we define COPD and look at its prevalence and morbidity as well as mortality rates. With regard to COPD, a key element is differentiating between COPD and asthma. In children and young adults, the most likely chronic airway disease is asthma, whereas in adults—generally after 40—COPD becomes more common.

The second article focuses on treating COPD patients with medications. There are a variety of national and international management and treatment guidelines available. Here we examine the latest treatment options and pharmacology according to treatment guidelines. We also identify therapeutic goals and ways in which to work with patients to meet their goals.

In the final article, we explore going beyond medications as treatment options for patients with COPD and address certain risk factors that have been associated with the development of COPD, such as smoking and occupational exposures.

Physicians treating patients with COPD can make a difference. We hope that this issue of AOA Health Watch helps you “breathe a bit easier” when called on to diagnose and treat patients with COPD.