

NLHEP News

COPD Awareness and Patient Support: From Home to the Halls of Congress

by Gretchen Lawrence, BA, RRT, FAARC

There's lots of competition for airtime and print space, so it's necessary to be creative to keep COPD as a "headline." Such a creative and "moving" campaign is the Mobile Spirometry Unit (MSU), a project of the COPD Foundation, with support from the AARC and National Lung Health Education Program® (NLHEP). Going from health fair to health fair around the country, the van carries the message that spirometry is the key to diagnosing COPD.

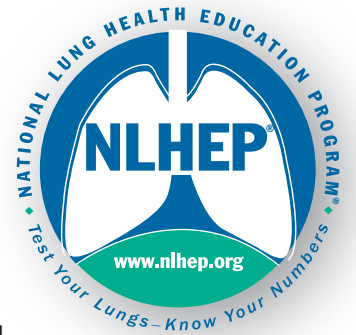
The program is using well-trained respiratory therapists (recruited by the AARC) to do spirometry testing on about 700 fair attendees per event. It is helping to find people with abnormal spirometry results, urging them to seek medical attention, and handing out educational materials, including "Save Your Breath America" from the NLHEP. Between January (when the van was introduced during the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's COPD campaign kickoff in Washington, DC) and June 1, the van has visited 14 cities.

You don't have to have the mobile spirometry van to make an impact. Consider providing support to those with COPD by hosting a regularly scheduled Better Breathing Club (BBC). It doesn't have to be fancy, just fun; and with support from your local health care community, it can be almost free.

The Baylor University Medical Center (Dallas, TX) BBC began in 1981 as an integral part of the new hospital pulmonary rehabilitation program, and both are still going strong. According to Mary Hart, RRT, (mc.hart@baylorhealth.edu) manager of the



Patient Ronald Morris and wife Joyce enjoyed a holiday dinner at Baylor Martha Foster Lung Care Center.



Baylor Martha Foster Lung Care Center, keys to success include: presenting interesting programs, sending out regular meeting announcements, getting financial support from local home care companies, and conducting the programs in a location that is easy to get to and includes free parking. This 27-year-old club has some traditional events, including a big holiday party with a sit-down lunch (instead of the usual cookies and punch), a white elephant gift exchange, and a visit from Santa. Hart reports that while it is challenging to come up with new topics, recycling old topics works because of the changing audience and the need to repeat some very important messages, such as how to use medications correctly and how to avoid infection. Topics and speakers have been diverse, ranging from a local Medicare expert, to a flower arranger, to a past Nobel Prize winner.

Kathy Geier-Craft, RRT (geiercraft@gmail.com) in Lincoln, NE, just kicked off a new BBC in February (which, in hindsight, was maybe not the best time, considering that it was minus 12 degrees the evening of their first meeting!). Geier-Craft, who works in a pulmonary physician's office, has support from three local hospitals, and the local newspaper's self-help section lets her announce the meetings for free. Geier-Craft makes a very good point regarding the value of support groups for COPD: "As RTs, we know that the COPD population is huge, but the individual patient with COPD can feel very isolated and alone." With input from COPD patients, she has programs planned through the end of 2007, including a lecture by Jeff Gonzalez, RRT-NPS (the Nebraska Society's delegate), on "Legislative Issues and the COPD Patient."

Of note, in his May 2007 "Observations" column in *AARC Times* titled "The Power of Patient Partnerships," Sam Giordano, MBA, RRT, FAARC, executive director of the AARC, urged RTs to let their COPD patients know that the AARC is working on their behalf in Washington, DC. The patient's voice can be a powerful one. Add it to yours to make sure that the needs of the COPD population are met, both locally and nationally. ■

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