Poor Access to Care for Asthma Means More Hospital Visits

by KATE TURNER

Access to Primary Care for Asthma and ER Visits Linked

Asthma sufferers with poor access to a general practitioner (GP) are more likely to experience trips to the emergency room, new research shows.

The findings out of the University of East Anglia show that when people with asthma have better access to their primary care doctor they are less likely to experience emergency hospital admissions. Asthma attacks that lead to a visit to the ER are predominantly life threatening, so avoiding this situation is crucial.

“Up to 90 per cent of deaths and 70 per cent of emergency admissions with asthma are associated with potentially preventable factors,” says lead researcher Dr. Robert Fleetcroft.

Looking at the size of the practice, whether patients could get through on the phone, whether patients could book appointments, and more, they evaluated access to primary care in England. They found that practices with better access to care had fewer emergency admissions for asthma-related issues.

“We found that for every 10 percent improvement in access there was a 32 percent reduction in emergency admissions. This is really important because there’s a significant risk of death for anyone making an emergency trip to hospital with asthma,” Dr. Fleetcroft continues.

If you have asthma, you should see your GP if:

- Coughing or wheezing get worse
- You have a fever
- Symptoms are not improving despite following your action plan
- You are having difficulty breathing
- You notice more mucus or a change in your mucus

It is crucial to seek emergency medical attention if you are having severe difficulties breathing, and knowing what to do during an asthma attack could save your life.

Dr. Samantha Walker, the director of research and policy at Asthma UK responded to these new findings in a statement: “People with asthma tell us that it can be difficult to book an appointment with their GP or nurse, so this new research shows how absolutely vital it is that they persist, are not fobbed off and are able to get the help they need.”

The hope with this research is that lives will be saved if access to care can be improved.

“It’s essential that access to GP care for asthma patients improves to keep them out of hospital. One in six people who receive emergency treatment for an asthma attack need emergency treatment again within two weeks,” Dr. Walker continues in her statement.

“Three people die of an asthma attack every day and two of these deaths are preventable with better basic care.”