The Afternoon for International Talk

Guidelines and Strategies in The Management of Asthma—A Global Overview

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Asthma irrespective severity in a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airways. It is one of the most common chronic disease worldwide and is increasing in children. Asthma occurs in all countries regardless of the level of socioeconomic development, but appears to be more common in affluent than in nonaffluent populations. Atopy, the genetic predisposition for developing an IgE-mediated response to common environmental allergens, is the strongest identifiable predisposing factor for developing asthma. Allergens exposure and chemical sensitizers are the most important risk factors for the onset of asthma.

Contributing factors such as viral infections, small size at birth, diet, smoking, and environmental pollutants may increase this susceptibility to the development of the disease in predisposed individuals.

The management of asthma is highly topical because it poses clinical and healthcost challenges. Guidelines on the management of asthma not only help to set standards of clinical care and may serve as a basis for audit, but also act as a starting point for the education of health professionals. They ensure that all members of the health professional team are aware of the goals of treatment and of the different ways of achieving these goals.

Asthma should be correctly diagnosed, its severity assessed, and appropriate treatment prescribed. Equally important is that asthmatic patients must use the treatment correctly. Clear communication is the key to good compliance. Patient education involves a partnership between patient and health professional with frequent revision and reinforcement.

It is unlikely that the production of the guidelines alone will reduce morbidity. There is unease over the universal acceptability of well-publicised guidelines such as the NIH or BTS guidelines. Reasons include concern over the socioeconomic implications of such a plan in less affluent countries or areas or population groups of different affluence within the same country; the differences in the prescribing habits of doctors with different practice backgrounds; and the effect of cultural influences on the preference of the patients for certain formulations or types of medications. Hence, such guidelines have to be adapted to a local level so that there may be a greater feeling of ownership and relevance. The challenge lies in the implementation of the guidelines followed by serial audits to demonstrate improved care and reduction of morbidity.