

First-Ever Patient Study of Severe Asthma in Canada Identifies Significant Gaps in Treatment and Care

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On the occasion of World Asthma Day, the Asthma Society of Canada released the first-ever patient study of Severe Asthma in Canada. The study, *Severe Asthma: The Canadian Patient Journey*, takes an in-depth look at the personal, social, medical and economic burden of Severe Asthma in Canada. Severe Asthma (SA), a more severe form of asthma and a greater threat to life, impacts the health and economic well-being of between 150,000 and 250,000 Canadians. Between 250 and 300 Canadians will die this year of asthma. Beyond personal costs, asthma is the leading cause of hospital admission in Canada. Between 2010 and 2011, direct and indirect costs associated with treating asthma topped more than \$1-billion.

"The good news in this report is that SA is a disease Canadians have the possibility to control. We need more research into SA, more attention to the issue by physicians and government, and more resources to educate patients about how to manage their disease," said Robert Oliphant, President and CEO of the Asthma Society of Canada. "If we can rally against SA, we will save lives and improve the quality of life for hundreds of thousands of patients and their families. All we need to do is act," he added.

Severe Asthma: The Canadian Patient Journey, included extensive interviews with SA patients in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, as well as responses from every province through an on-line survey. It highlights the patient experience of SA, in their daily lives, in the healthcare system, with respect to treatment options and with family, friends and in the work place. The study defined important discoveries about SA's impact on Canadians.

Key Findings Include:

SA is generally poorly understood and diagnosed, and inconsistently managed by healthcare providers. Its severity is discounted by patients themselves, sometimes as a result of the stigma associated with the disease.

SA significantly reduces the personal, social, financial and health outcomes for many Canadians. SA has a noticeable impact on the Canadian economy.

Treatment of SA is hindered by availability of specialists, misdiagnoses and lack of patient understanding.

New treatment options are not well-known by patients or physicians.

The Asthma Society of Canada has issued a Call to Action, calling upon:

Professional medical associations to establish a clear definition of SA based on new international guidelines that patients can understand and physicians will use to make diagnoses;

Physicians to make full use of objective lung function testing before diagnosing Severe Asthma instead of simply relying on symptoms as reported by patients;

Patients to learn to manage their asthma and to recognize when their asthma is not under control before ending up in a hospital;

Governments to recognize the financial burden of SA on the patient and to increase funding for research into SA, its causes, types, treatments and cure;

Employers to accommodate employees with SA regarding workplace environment, flexible working hours and medical leave when required, without adding to the stigma often faced by people with Severe Asthma.

During an interview one patient explained the difficulty she had experienced in getting treatment for her SA. She said, "The worst part of living with asthma used to be that nobody believed me. It's kind of an invisible illness. You don't always want to say 'I am not feeling well, I have asthma' because there is still a stigma. Even when you go to the hospital they ask, 'Well, how bad is your asthma attack?' What difference does it make? An asthma attack is an asthma attack and I need help, otherwise I wouldn't be here."

Electronic copies of Severe Asthma: The Canadian Patient Journey can be found at www.asthma.ca in English and French.

About the Asthma Society of Canada

The Asthma Society of Canada (ASC) is a national charitable volunteer-supported organization devoted to enhancing the quality of life and health for people living with asthma and associated allergies through education, research and advocacy. The ASC has a 40-year reputation of providing health education services to patients and healthcare professionals. This study was made possible in part by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc., Roche Canada and Boston Scientific Ltd. who provided educational grants to the Asthma Society of Canada.

SOURCE: Asthma Society of Canada

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