

Health Bulletin

Asthma: Separating Fact From Fiction

by Harold M. Koenig, M.D.

(NAPSA)—Cases of asthma, a condition characterized by wide and sometimes rapid fluctuations in a person's ability to move air in and out of his or her lungs, are increasing at an alarming rate. Asthma is now more than a disease; it is a hot political topic. It is important to use this political will to generate a national commitment to learn more about the disease so in the long-term it might be prevented and in the short-term, it can be better managed.

Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher stated, "One of the real issues is, why are we seeing the increase in asthma? And we don't know the answer to that. Until you understand why you have an increase, and you have documented it, it is very hard to say you have a strategy that is going to make a difference."

Asthma has been around a very long time. The first known descriptions date from the 16th century. Henry Hyde Salter documented the correlation of asthma with cold air, dust and animals in 1911.

Genetics plays a role in which people get asthma, but that does not explain everything. The allergen interaction with genetically susceptible individuals is obviously important. A lot of things are on the suspect list as causes of asthma or being capable of triggering an attack. But, scientific evidence to support many of these suspicions is not conclusive. The answers to "why" or "how" people get asthma will take time and money to learn.

There are far too many children still not being properly medically managed. Proper management should prevent virtually all lost days from school, emergency room visits and hospital admissions for asthma.

Dr. Koenig, Vice Admiral Retired, is a former Surgeon General of the U.S. Navy. He is currently Chair and President of the Annapolis Center for Science-Based Public Policy.