



# Health Awareness

## Dispelling a Common Health Myth: Study Demonstrates Burden of Chronic Bronchitis and Emphysema on Baby Boomers

(NAPSA)—COPD, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease—a lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema—is commonly thought of as a condition that affects the elderly. But study results show that those most burdened by this disabling condition are baby boomers.

The study analyzed health care records from a large managed-care database, and found that the economic burden of COPD is actually greater among baby boomers than among older patients. Surprisingly, it showed that patients under age 65 had more emergency room visits related to COPD and higher average health care costs than those past retirement age. Although not unexpected, there were fewer hospitalizations of baby boomers than in the elderly.

“These results are alarming because health care costs usually increase as patients age and their disease worsens,” said the study’s lead author, David G. Tinkelman, M.D., vice president for health initiatives at the National Jewish Medical and Research Center in Denver. “COPD is no longer your grandfather’s disease. These findings challenge common myths about the disease, demonstrating the impact of COPD and its disabling effect on people in the prime of their lives.”

COPD is a progressive disease of the airways characterized by a loss of lung function over time. Affecting more than 12 million Americans, it’s primarily a disease of current and former smokers. Common symptoms include chronic cough, excess mucus production, wheezing and shortness of breath.

A leading cause of disability and death in the United States, COPD is associated with a cascade of decline that may begin with breathlessness during high-energy activities in the mild stage. This leads to decreased activity, which may contribute to the loss of muscle strength in the moderate stage. In severe to very severe COPD, patients are breathless, even at rest. Most people with COPD are at least 40 years old or around middle age when symptoms start. The early signs of COPD—shortness of breath on exertion and coughing—are often attributed to getting older or being out of shape, and some patients mistakenly think that if they quit smoking, the symptoms will go away.

“COPD is a manageable condition,” said Tinkelman. “Through proper diagnosis, smoking cessation and early treatment intervention, patients may breathe easier and continue doing the activities they enjoy.”

Patients who are experiencing symptoms should see their physician to discuss the best ways to manage their condition.

The study, sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and Pfizer Inc., was published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

### COPD Symptoms

#### Mild

- Feel a little short of breath after you work hard or do high-energy activities (such as climbing stairs or dancing)
- Cough frequently and sometimes cough up mucus

#### Moderate

- Feel short of breath when you walk up a hill
- Have trouble doing chores like mowing the lawn, vacuuming, or carrying laundry
- Cough frequently and sometimes cough up mucus
- Cut back on activities you enjoy

#### Severe to Very Severe

- Get short of breath during low-energy activities such as walking to the mailbox
- Not able to work or take part in simple activities you enjoy
- Have trouble breathing day and night

