

# A Breath of Fresh Air

A newsletter for Reliant Medical Group COPD patients and their families

Vol. XI, No. 1

*Edited by Margalit Lai, RN, MS, COPD Program Care Manager*

Winter 2014

So, here we are enduring another very cold New England winter. I hope you are all staying warm and snugly indoors.

If you **have** to go out when it's cold, remember to always wear a scarf covering your mouth and nose so the air has a chance to get a little warmer before it hits your nose and lungs. Staying active this time of year is a challenge as well. One of your best options is the Senior Center in your town. These centers have different kinds of programs to get you going. Give them a call and check it out.

In this issue you will get to meet our new pulmonologist, Dr. Michael Barretti, who joined our team recently. We now have five excellent pulmonologists available to you.

This is also a good time to remind you to call our weather line when you have an appointment on a snow day and need to know if the clinic is open. The number is: **(508) 425-5696**.



For those of you who have been looking for a support group to help you deal with your COPD I recommend The Better Breathers Club. This is a program that offers you the opportunity to learn ways to better cope with COPD while getting the support of others who share in your struggles. These support groups give you the tools you need to live the best quality of life possible.

Better Breathers Clubs meet regularly and deal with a wide range of relevant topics, including:

- ✓ How COPD affects the lungs
- ✓ Breathing techniques
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Talking with your physician
- ✓ Medications and other treatment options
- ✓ Medical tests
- ✓ Supplemental oxygen
- ✓ Home health care
- ✓ Lung transplants
- ✓ Air pollution



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## In His Own Words... Dr. Michael Barretti discusses COPD



While I am originally from Central Massachusetts, my education, training and practice have led me all around the country and the world. I attended college at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. I then graduated from Touro University

College of Osteopathic Medicine in Vallejo, California in 2003 and completed a residency in internal medicine, as well as a fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine at the University of Massachusetts in Worcester.

I began practicing pulmonary and critical care medicine with Reliant in 2013, having previously practiced primary care internal medicine for the United States Navy, as well as operational and combat surgery for the Marine Corps during the Iraq war. Although my experience has led me to some pretty strange and exciting locations, I am happy to be back in Central Massachusetts helping the people of my community.

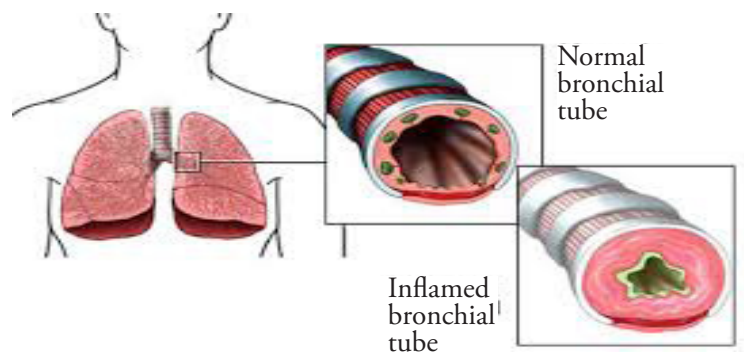
This looks to me like a good opportunity to also talk to you today about what COPD actually is.

COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It represents a set of conditions leading to the inability of the lungs to function properly. These includes chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and to some degree, chronic asthma. The nature of these diseases prevents the lung from moving air in and out efficiently, and in some cases impedes the transport of oxygen and carbon dioxide between the lungs and the bloodstream.

As the natural elasticity of the lung is lost (as in emphysema), or as the airways are chronically narrowed with inflammation (as in chronic bronchitis), the air that enters the lungs has a more difficult time leaving the lungs. Over time, the trapping of air is what we refer to as obstructive lung disease. While chronic bronchitis and emphysema are separate and distinct conditions, most patients with COPD from cigarette smoking have features of both of these.

### Chronic bronchitis

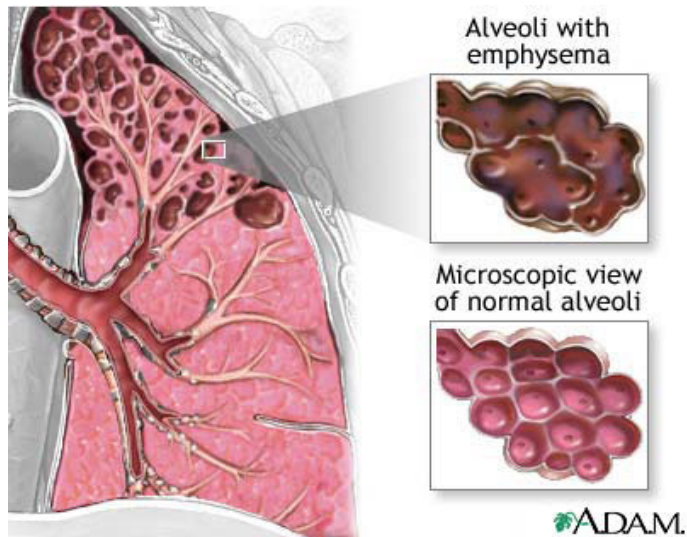
Chronic bronchitis is one of the obstructive lung diseases, which primarily affects the airways of the lungs. Prolonged exposure to environmental toxins or cigarette smoke causes inflammation in the lining of the airways. Over time these airways narrow and secrete increasing amounts of mucus. The narrowing of the airways is what leads to obstructive physiology within the lung. In addition, the increased mucus secretion can lead to a chronic daily productive cough.



### Emphysema

Emphysema is a term used to describe the destruction of the alveolar units of the lung. Normally these alveolar units resemble a bunch of grapes, covered in small capillary beds which aid in the transport of oxygen from our lungs into our bloodstream. The efficiency of gas transport relies heavily upon the large surface area of this structure. The prolonged presence of cigarette smoke or other

toxins leads to a destruction of the architecture of these alveolar segments, thus reducing the overall surface area and thereby reducing the efficiency of oxygen and carbon dioxide transport to and from the bloodstream.



While COPD is a chronic, irreversible condition, a careful combined approach between you, your primary care physician, your pulmonary doctor and your nurse care manager can minimize the long-term effects and disability too often seen with this disease. Regularly scheduled health maintenance exams as well as routine evaluation by a pulmonary professional are critical to identifying warning signs early, and preventing frequent exacerbations. Lastly, maintaining an overall healthy lifestyle that includes daily exercise and well balanced nutrition will help your body compensate for some of the symptoms of COPD. The level of exercise you should pursue should be discussed with your physician prior to starting.

## Better Breathers Club

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If you feel alone and isolated, these support groups can help. It feels good to talk with others who understand, and that in turn has a positive impact on your health.

Here are two locations in our area that have monthly meetings:

- ✓ **Millbury Health Care Center –  
312 Millbury Avenue, Millbury, MA.**  
This group meets on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month from 2:00pm – 3:00pm in the dining room. For more information contact Robin Cestaro, (508) 713-4424.
- ✓ **Northboro Senior Center –  
119 Bearfoot Rd, Northborough, MA.**  
This group meets on the third Thursday of every month. The telephone number is (508) 393-5035.

## In other news:

- We have \$10 Off coupons for Nicorette patches, gum and lozenges. Please let me know if you would like any.
- Those of you who are on oxygen, especially those of you who are not on it all the time, can benefit from a pulse oximeter that tells you if you need oxygen or not. The cheapest pulse oximeter as far as I know is available through Amazon. It costs \$22.42 and is called the CMS 50D Blue Finger pulse oximeter.
- Please remember to call Chris Andersson or myself when you end up at Saint Vincent hospital. Some insurances let us know through our computer program that you are hospitalized, but some don't. So, please call us and let us know!!
- An important reminder – please call Chris Andersson or myself if you talk to a pulmonologist or go to Urgent Care over the weekend or after hours. That way we know what has been going on with you and can follow up.

# Patients' Contribution



- \* **Millie Bongovio** uses her pedometer daily to keep track of her activity and finds it a great motivator. The pedometer she has been using is by Omron and costs \$27.88 through Amazon.
- \* **Tom Jones** (not the singer 😊) recommends Keepez which is a great and simple gadget to keep your fruits and vegetables lasting longer. Since fruits and vegetables are good for you and taste great but are a bit expensive and with a short shelf life, this gadget comes in really handy. These are lids you can fit on any container and with a simple squeeze, they create a vacuum that protects the fruits and vegetables. Keepez is affordable and available on the Amazon website and Bed Bath and Beyond as well.
- \* **Robert Lavigne** tells us how he started exercising and how much he likes it. When his wife was hospitalized at the Worcester Medical Center, he started walking the long corridors because he was not able to just sit there and wait. After a few days, he realized he was feeling a lot better. He was less short of breath and less anxious. He continued being physically active at home and states he never realized until now what a big difference exercise really makes.

PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO CALL US. **NEVER SAY –**  
I DID NOT WANT TO BOTHER YOU, I THOUGHT I WOULD GET  
BETTER, I HAD AN APPOINTMENT ALREADY SCHEDULED.  
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

## Here's how to reach us

### *By phone:*

Margalit Lai: (508) 368-3936

Chris Andersson: (508) 368-3935

### *Our email address:*

[margalit.lai@reliantmedicalgroup.org](mailto:margalit.lai@reliantmedicalgroup.org)

[christine.andersson@reliantmedicalgroup.org](mailto:christine.andersson@reliantmedicalgroup.org)

### *Our "old fashioned" address:*

WMC Suite 390, 123 Summer Street, Worcester, MA 01608

### *Online you can check us out at:*

[www.reliantmedicalgroup.org/copd](http://www.reliantmedicalgroup.org/copd)

