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News Release

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Asthma care costs UK at least £1.1bn each year, study shows

Asthma costs the UK health service at least £1.1 billion each year, researchers have estimated.

The findings are the result of the most comprehensive study of the state of asthma in UK to date.

Researchers found that at least three people die each day from asthma attacks. Experts say the majority of asthma deaths are preventable and greater focus on basic care is needed to cut the rates of severe attacks.

Researchers used information from national health surveys and anonymised administrative, health and social care records to build a picture of asthma in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The UK-wide team, led by the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research at The University of Edinburgh, found that there were around 6.4 million GP and nurse consultations for asthma each year. More than 270 people are admitted to hospital each day because of asthma attacks.

Of the £1.1b cost of treating asthma in the UK, at least £666 million is spent on prescription costs each year. Other costs include £160m on GP consultations, £143m on disability claims and £137m on hospital care.

Researchers say their figures are likely to be substantial underestimates because they did not take into account people for whom asthma was not their main illness.

They say their findings confirm that the UK has one of the highest burdens of asthma in the world. More than 18 million people are treated for the condition at some stage in their lifetime.

The study is published in *BMC Medicine* journal and was funded by Asthma UK, with additional funding from Edinburgh Clinical Trials Unit and The Farr Institute.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Mome Mukherjee, of the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research and Edinburgh Clinical Trials Unit at the University of Edinburgh, said: “Our study pulled together multiple sources of routinely collected data across the administrative and health and social care sectors of the UK nations. Our findings offer the first comprehensive estimates of the burden of asthma in all the four nations of the UK.”

Professor Aziz Sheikh, Director of the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research at the University of Edinburgh, said: “Even with conservative assumptions, we find almost 100,000 people are admitted to hospital and there are at least 1000 deaths from asthma each year in the UK. This is unacceptable for a condition that, for most people, can be managed effectively with the right support from their GP. Greater focus on primary care is needed if we are to cut rates of severe asthma attacks, hospitalisations and deaths.”

Kay Boycott, Chief Executive of Asthma UK, said: “Despite the fact we’re spending over a billion pounds a year on asthma, many people are still not receiving care that meets even the most basic clinical standards. It’s clear this has to change and a different approach is urgently needed. We strongly believe new technologies such as smart inhalers are the likely game changer that could reduce asthma attacks and ease the burden on the NHS. Supporting people to better manage their asthma with new technologies would likely lead to healthier lifestyles, reducing the need for NHS appointments and admissions and freeing up care for those who need it most.”

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Links:

Journal article during embargo:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/l6icb3gxf3c7dg/ResearchArticle_BMC%20Medicine.pdf?dl=0

Journal article after embargo:

<https://bmcmmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-016-0657-8>

Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research: www.aukcar.ac.uk