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News Release

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Support people with asthma to manage their illness, researchers say

People with asthma should be given tailored support to help them manage their condition, experts say.

Helping people with asthma take control of their own illness reduces symptoms, improves quality of life, reduces emergency use of health services and even prevents deaths, research has shown.

Supported self-management has been recommended in asthma guidelines for the past three decades, but implementation is patchy.

Clinicians and healthcare organisations should prioritise making sure that every person with asthma has access to support to help them control their illness, researchers say.

A team led by the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research at the University of Edinburgh, Queen Mary's University of London and University of Manchester reviewed results from 270 studies that evaluated the success of supported self-management.

People of all ages and from a range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds benefit from tailored support to help control their own symptoms, the review found.

Asthma is a common condition, affecting 334 million people worldwide. In the UK, asthma accounts for more than six million GP consultations and 100,000 hospital admissions each year, costing an estimated £1 billion annually.

Supported self-management helps people recognise early signs that their asthma is worsening and to take action accordingly.

Each patient is offered a personalised action plan with details of what medicines to take and advice on when to seek help if symptoms are getting worse. Patients have regular check ups to review their progress and their action plan is updated as needed.

Studies have shown that the approach saves lives, yet a 2014 review of asthma deaths suggested more than three-quarters of patients did not have an action plan to help them manage their condition.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The study, published in the journal *BMC Medicine*, was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Services and Delivery Research Programme.

Professor Hilary Pinnock, of the Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research at the University of Edinburgh, said: “Evidence is compelling that supported self-management for asthma works. The challenge is in making sure it is implemented across the health service, so that every person with asthma has access to a personal action plan and knows what to do if their condition is worsening.

“Supported self-management is being promoted across all long-term conditions and asthma has the best evidence base, so it should be an exemplar. We hope our review will be alert those commissioning or delivering services for people with asthma to the importance of ensuring that supported self-management for asthma is implemented now.”

Dr Samantha Walker, Director of Research and Policy at Asthma UK, said: “It is well known that self-management is essential in helping people with asthma achieve good asthma control; whilst self-management can be complex, this research shows that it can significantly improve quality of life and reduce the rates of hospital admissions and visits to A&E.

“Two out of three asthma deaths are preventable with good basic care, and this research shows the difference supported self-management can make. We must take a bold new approach and take advantage of digital health solutions that could transform the way asthma care is delivered and support self-management. Digital action plans, smart inhalers and automated GP alerts are just some of the ways asthma care could be brought up to date and reduce the risk of potentially fatal asthma attacks.”

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