

The Communication Gap between Patients with COPD and Pulmonologists Regarding Inhalation Delivery Devices: Results From Paired On-Line Surveys

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Background:

Inhalational medications are preferred for the chronic maintenance therapy of COPD. Clinicians have several devices available to deliver medications, including small volume nebulizers. While guidelines recommend medications that may be useful in specific COPD patient types, none recommend which delivery devices may benefit specific patients. Whether there is adequate assessment and communication between pulmonologists and patients with COPD regarding appropriate device selection and use is unclear. We sought to assess whether such a gap exists.

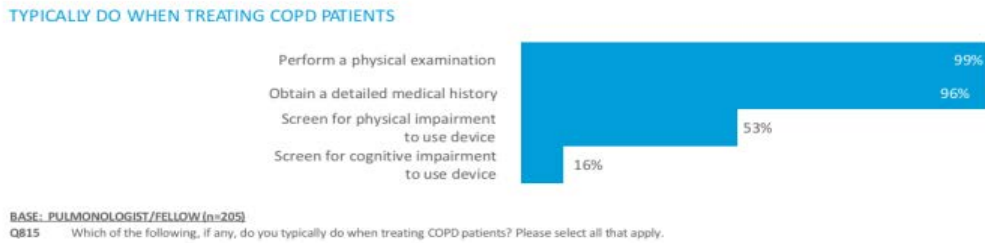
Methods:

Two online surveys were designed by a steering committee including ATS clinicians and scientists and conducted by Harris Poll between January 7 and January 29, 2016. More than 6,200 pulmonologists and fellows from the USA were solicited via email from the ATS membership roster as well as from attendees of the ATS 2014 and 2015 International Conference, all of whom had previously indicated "COPD" as a topic of interest to them. Using a database maintained by Harris Poll, patients who had previously identified themselves as having a diagnosis of COPD in the USA were sent a similar survey. A total of 205 pulmonologists and fellows as well as 254 COPD patients completed the surveys. The robust sample size (n>100) supported quantitative analysis.

Results:

While 99% of pulmonologists perform a physical exam on their COPD patients, only 53% and 16% respectively report assessing patients' physical and cognitive ability to use specific devices. 54% of pulmonologists report discussing device options with their patients. 70% report they typically discuss how to use a device during the first visit. In contrast, 24% of patients state that no one explained to them why nebulizers may be an appropriate choice and 65% report getting little to no information on how to clean and maintain their device.

Fig. 1: Screened for Physical Ability to Use the Device at visit for COPD Patient as Reported by Physicians



Conclusions:

Our results show that an assessment and communication gap exists between pulmonologists and patients with COPD regarding inhalation devices. Although most pulmonologists typically discuss device use during a patient's first visit, storage and cleaning are discussed by few. In addition, while the vast majority (99%) of pulmonologists perform a physical exam, patients are not assessed for the ability to use a prescribed inhalation device. Greater education and consensus are required to help close this communication gap.