

# Breath of Fresh Air

Volume 10, No. 3

Information, news and advice for improving asthma well-being

Winter 2007–08

## New National Guidelines for Diagnosis and Management of Asthma

This fall the National Institutes of Health, through their National Asthma Education and Prevention Program, released an updated set of guidelines for the diagnosis and management of asthma. It had been 10 years since a previous set of guidelines were issued. Much has been learned about asthma and its treatment in the last decade. The new guidelines, called *Expert Panel Report 3 (EPR-3)*, are meant to summarize this progress and, based on it, present a coherent set of recommendations to physicians and other health-care providers to help guide them in optimal care for asthma.

The entire 412-page report from the panel of experts assembled to develop these guidelines is available online, along with a recently released summary document. The web site is: [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/). Although the document was prepared for healthcare providers, an important emphasis in it is the component called “Education for a Partnership in Asthma Care.” The authors of the report stressed the role of a well-informed person with asthma in helping to manage his or her own asthma. They wrote: “Expert care, with regular review by health professionals, is necessary but not sufficient to improve outcomes [in chronic asthma]. Patients must actively participate in their own care, which means consciously using strategies and taking actions to minimize exposure to factors that make asthma harder to control and adjusting treatments to improve disease control.” They cited evidence that there are major benefits to learning “the self-management skills of self-assessment, use of medications, and actions to prevent or control exacerbations.” The benefits include fewer visits to doctors for urgent care, fewer hospitalizations for severe asthmatic attacks, and improvements in your overall health status.

### Learning tasks

They offer a checklist of learning tasks – obtaining knowledge and skills—that each person with asthma

should accomplish. This is what you should do and know:

- Learn basic facts about asthma;
- Know what constitutes well-controlled asthma and identify your own current level of asthma control;
- Know the roles of the asthma medications that you take;
- Be skilled at properly using your inhaler, “spacer” (also called a “valved holding chamber”), and peak flow meter;
- Be able to identify signs and symptoms of worsening asthma and know how to deal with them;
- Know when and where to seek care during an asthma flare; and
- Know the measures to take to reduce exposures to asthma triggers in your environment (home, school, or workplace).

In a separate article in this issue of *Breath of Fresh Air*, we address the subject of “what constitutes well-controlled asthma” (see “Good Asthma Control: What Is It and Have You Achieved It?”, on p.2). Here we reflect briefly on the origins of the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program.

### Origins of the National Asthma Program

In the 1970s and 1980s we seemed to be losing the battle against asthma. Not only was asthma becoming more common, but it was becoming more severe. In all age groups the frequency of severe asthmatic attacks requiring hospitalization was on the rise, and deaths due to uncontrolled asthma were steadily increasing. It was against this backdrop of concern about the rising human and healthcare costs of asthma—despite new scientific knowledge about asthma and its treatments—that

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## Good Asthma Control: What Is It and Have You Achieved It?

If you have asthma, you have experienced the symptoms of cough, chest tightness, and wheezing characteristic of the disease. You have taken a quick-acting bronchodilator like albuterol (ProAir, Proventil, Ventolin) to relieve these symptoms. You may have been wakened from your sleep because of cough or difficulty breathing. And perhaps you have experienced an asthmatic attack, when these symptoms seemed temporarily out of control and when your quick-acting bronchodilator could not immediately relieve them fully. You could not go to work or school or perform your usual daily tasks because you could not breathe well enough to do so.

You may have wondered: *is this what I can expect because I have asthma? Is this what everyone with asthma goes through? Is this what I have to put up with, given my diagnosis of asthma, or could I do better?* In the recently released “Asthma Guidelines” in the Expert Panel Report 3 (see page 1 in this issue of *Breath of Fresh Air*), the expectations of modern asthma treatment are set forth. Here is what, in general terms, the panel of experts considered appropriate goals for living with asthma.

- Prevent persistent and troublesome symptoms;
- Maintain normal activity levels;
- Maintain normal or near-normal lung function; and
- Prevent recurrent exacerbations of asthma and minimize the need for emergency department visits or hospitalizations.

In fact, they were quite specific about what they considered good asthma control. They divided their expectations into two general categories: preventing current symptoms and preventing future asthmatic attacks. In terms of current symptoms, the targets are as follows:

- Symptoms of asthma requiring relief with your quick-acting bronchodilator no more than two times per week;
- Night-time awakenings due to asthmatic symptoms no more than twice per month;
- Symptoms interfering with your normal activities – none.

In terms of risk of asthmatic attacks, good asthma control might entail, at the most, one attack over the past year severe enough to require treatment with oral corticosteroids. Finally, one other goal of good asthma control is avoidance of severe or troublesome medication side effects.

### *Assessing asthma control at your doctor’s office visit*

When you visit your asthma doctor, you can expect to be asked about the activity of your asthma. Your doctor should ask you—or you can volunteer to your doctor—how often you have had to use your quick-relief bronchodilator in the last two weeks (not counting anticipatory use, such as before exercise, to *prevent* asthmatic symptoms); how often your sleep has been disturbed by asthmatic symptoms; whether your asthma has prevented you for performing your normal day-to-day activities (at home, at work, at school, or at the gym); and whether you have had any severe asthmatic attacks since your last visit. And you can expect to have your lung function measured, either with a peak flow meter or with the more complete pulmonary testing called spirometry.

What if you are not achieving good asthma control, if the frequency of your symptoms, the frequency or severity of asthmatic attacks, or your lung function is suboptimal. Then, you and your care provider will want to consider how better to manage your asthma, including the possibility of intensifying your regular asthma treatments. The Expert Panel refers to this strategy as “stepping up” your asthma care. We will discuss their recommendations for how best to increase your asthma care in a step-wise fashion in the next issue of *Breath of Fresh Air*.

## **Breath of Fresh Air**

Editor-in-chief

Christopher H. Fanta, M. D.

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## A Glorious Gala!

Partners Asthma Center held its annual fundraising event—a wine and food tasting and silent auction—on Thursday, Nov. 1 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Cambridge. It was great evening, bringing together patients and providers in a celebration of our accomplishments in treating asthma and re-dedicating ourselves to further progress in silencing the “wheezy roar of asthma.”

We gave recognition to the **Honorable Thomas Menino**, Mayor of Boston, as the Partners Asthma Center 2007 Asthma Honoree. In so doing, we paid tribute to the accomplishments of his Boston Public Health Commission in combating asthma for residents of Boston. In particular, we recognized the Healthy Homes program; the highly visible and successful “Kids with Asthma Can ...” campaign; the Boston Asthma Summer Day-Camp program; the initiative to train health workers at the Community Health Education Center; and a scholarship program for nurses interested in becoming certified Asthma Educators. In addition, Mayor Menino has been a powerful advocate for efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic healthcare disparities in our community.

We also celebrated the remarkable accomplishments of three of our patients at Partners Asthma Center. **Chloe Fross**, **Jennifer Scalise-Marinosky**, and **Helena Walker** received the Partners Asthma Center 2007 Asthma Awards for their achievements in athletics and intellectual endeavors. Chloe Fross is an eighth grader with a great love of sports. Despite her exercise-induced asthma, in middle school she set school records in the 400- and 800-meter track events and played on the varsity soccer team. Jennifer Scalise-Marinosky has had asthma since early childhood and yet has become an accomplished triathlete. Three times she has qualified for and competed in the Ironman World Championship Triathlon in Hawaii: a 2.4 mile ocean swim in Kailua-Kona Bay, followed by a 112 mile bike ride across the Hawaiian lava desert to Hawi and back, and ending with a 26¼-mile marathon run along the coast of the Big Island.



*From left to right: Chloe Fross, Jennifer Scalise-Marinosky, Mayor Thomas Menino, and Helena Walker*

Nonetheless, she earned an undergraduate degree in Psychology and Social Relations at Harvard/Radcliffe. She was awarded an academic scholarship to attend Boston University’s School of Management, where she received a Masters of Science in Management Information Systems and subsequently her MBA. Until recently, she worked at Partners HealthCare System as a Clinical Applications Analyst.

We wish to acknowledge the many contributors who made this fundraising event a success. Generous donors and contributors to our silent auction included the following:

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| 75 Chestnut Street Restaurant                      | Maria Fusco                                      |
| 224 Boston Street Restaurant                       | Gordon Liquor Store (Watertown, MA)              |
| A-Plus Computer Service                            | Lilliam Hebbert                                  |
| The Artistry of Thomas Fallon                      | Hyatt Regency (Cambridge, MA)                    |
| Auto Detailing Center (Walpole, MA)                | Il Capriccio Restaurante (Waltham, MA)           |
| Biagio’s Restaurant (Waltham, MA)                  | Jury’s Boston Hotel                              |
| Bose Corporation                                   | Susan Klasky                                     |
| Boston Red Sox                                     | Legal Sea Foods                                  |
| Brasco Florist & Anthony Flower Shop (Waltham, MA) | Liberty Hotel                                    |
| Car Care (Longfellow Place, MGH)                   | Dr. Aidan Long                                   |
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| Dr. Jeffrey Drazen                                 | New England Patriots                             |
| Fiorella’s Restaurant (Newton, MA)                 | Julie Ochse of Centerra Wine Company             |
| Emilia Fusco                                       |  |

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*New National Guidelines, from p. 1*

the federal government, through its National Institutes of Health, launched a national program for asthma education, as it had done successfully before that time for medical education regarding hypertension and blood cholesterol levels.

As part of this national asthma program, a panel of experts (composed of asthma specialists, general medical physicians, nurses, and educators) came together to develop a set of recommendations regarding the evaluation and treatment of asthma, called the *Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma*. Dr. Albert Sheffer, allergist at Brigham and Women's Hospital and member of Partners Asthma Center, headed the first Expert Panel for this program. The first set of *Guidelines* were released in 1991. Since then the *Guidelines* issued by each successive Expert

Panel have become the standard for defining and assessing the quality of asthma care across the nation. A member of the most recent Expert Panel was Dr. Carlos Camargo, Jr., member of Partners Asthma Center and expert in Emergency Department management of asthma.

Now we have evidence that, with the help of national guidelines, asthma management in the United States is improving. Despite the fact that asthma remains an exceedingly common disease, the number of hospitalizations for asthma each year is on the decline; and asthma deaths have fallen from approximately 5,000 deaths/year to approximately 4,000 deaths/year. It appears that both patients and providers are doing a better job of achieving good asthma control.



*A Glorious Gala!, from p. 3*

(Thanks to these Contributors, continued)  
Pat's Place at Brigham and Women's Hospital  
Judge Vincent Ragosta  
Russo's Fruit Stand (Watertown, MA)  
Salon Mark Harris  
Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Skates  
Silver Liquor Store  
Silvia and Shawn Nersessian  
Steam Fish (Newton, MA)  
Steamers, Inc.  
Sunshine Care Wash (Watertown, MA)  
Toureen Pet Resort & Spa (Watertown, MA)  
Wang Center  
Whole Foods Market

And a special thank you to the members of the Gala and Silent Auction Planning Committee, whose tireless work over the preceding 12 months made the event such a smashing success:

Mark Anderson  
Judith Botting  
Elaine Carter  
Emilia Fusco  
Jose Portuondo  
Jacqueline Rodriguez-Louis  
Ann Wanyoike

Thanks too to Sue Ladr (of Ladr Design) for her design of our invitations and program booklet, and Rick Joly (of Goodway Graphics) for printing the invitations and program booklet.





## Paul J. Hannaway, M.D., 1937–2007



Partners Asthma Center has lost a great friend and colleague, and asthma sufferers on the North Shore have lost a beloved doctor and renowned asthma specialist. Dr. Paul Hannaway died on November 22, 2007; we continue to mourn his passing.

Dr. Hannaway attended Albany Medical College and completed his residency in Pediatrics at New England Medical Center. He did his subspecialty training in allergy and clinical immunology at Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago and Children's Hospital in Boston. Thereafter he founded the Asthma and Allergy Affiliates of North Shore and for decades provided outstanding medical care to persons with asthma and allergies. The practice expanded to sites in Danvers and North Andover as well as Salem and now includes his associates Jeanne Gose, MD, PhD, James MacLean, MD, Andrew Ober, MD, and Cristina Palumbo, MD.

Dr. Hannaway held numerous leadership positions in his field, reflecting the high regard in which he was held by his medical colleagues. He served as President of the Massachusetts Allergy and Asthma Society and of the New England Society of Allergy. He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and of the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. He was an Associate Clinical Professor at Tufts University School of Medicine.

Through his writing, Dr. Hannaway was able to reach a national audience. He had numerous articles published in medical journals and wrote several popular books, including

- *The Asthma Self-Help Book* (for which he won an American Medical Writers Association Award);
- *Asthma—An Emerging Epidemic*;
- *What To Do When the Doctor Says It's Asthma*;
- and, earlier this year, the highly acclaimed *On the Nature of Food Allergy*.

We will greatly miss his smile and good nature, his medical insights, and his guidance.

## Share Your Asthma Story

Do *you* have an asthma story to share with others?

Perhaps it's a lesson that you learned about living with asthma, an anecdote that would help others deal with their asthma, or a special way that you have learned to manage your asthma.

We'd like to hear from you and to have the opportunity to share your experiences with other readers of *Breath of Fresh Air*.

Please send us your asthma story:

- by mail (Partners Asthma Center, 15 Francis Street, Boston, MA 02115),
  - by e-mail ([asthma@partners.org](mailto:asthma@partners.org)), or
  - by fax (617-732-7421, att'n: *Breath of Fresh Air*).

If we choose your story to publish, we will send you our very special Partners Asthma Center coffee mug and fashionable Partners Asthma Center umbrella!

Thank you in advance for sharing your story.

All of us at Partners Asthma Center wish you a *Healthy and Happy New Year!*



### *Breath of Fresh Air*

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