Adding a Physical Activity Program with Coaching to Usual Care for Patients with COPD

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What was the research about?

Patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD, can have breathing problems and chronic cough. Being active may help people with COPD breathe more easily.

In this study, the research team wanted to learn if a physical activity program called Walk On! improved the health of patients with COPD when added to usual care. The program includes

- Education about physical activity and COPD
- A daily step-count goal and wearable step counter
- Four phone calls from a coach
- Check-in phone calls as needed over 11 months
- Monthly group visits for peer support

Usual care included services covered by a patient's health insurance, but no additional support for physical activity.

The research team first compared all patients assigned to Walk On! with patients who received usual care alone. The team then compared the smaller group of patients who actively took part in Walk On! with patients receiving usual care alone.

What were the results?

During the study, patients assigned to Walk On! and patients who received usual care alone had similar rates of emergency room visits and hospital stays. They also had similar rates of death for any reason.

After 10 months, patients who were in the group that actively took part in Walk On! had a lower risk of a short hospital stay compared with patients who received usual care alone. These patients were also more likely to report getting some physical activity and as much physical activity as recommended. After six months, these patients reported improved quality of life related to physical health and less time sitting compared with those receiving only usual care. But these changes were no longer present after one year.

Who was in the study?

The study included 2,707 patients ages 40 or older who went to the hospital because of COPD in the past year. All received care at Kaiser Permanente in Southern California. Of the patients, 74 percent were white, 14 percent were African American, 5 percent were Asian, 1 percent were Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 5 percent were other or unknown race. The average age was 72, and 54 percent were women.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned patients by chance to Walk On! plus usual care or usual care alone. The team reviewed patients' health records to look at use of health care, reported activity levels, and number of

deaths. Patients completed surveys on quality of life and physical activity when the study began and again 6 and 12 months later.

Patients with COPD, caregivers, COPD advocacy groups, clinicians, and health system leaders gave input during the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Only 24 percent of the patients invited to join Walk On! did so. Patients who took part in Walk On! may differ from those who didn't. Patients in the study reported

their own physical activity. It's possible those reports weren't always correct.

Future studies could look at other ways to support physical activity among patients with COPD.

How can people use the results?

Health systems can use the results when considering how to help patients with COPD increase their physical activity.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Nguyen293.