Is your patients’ Hay Fever disguising something more?

For people with asthma, the symptoms of hay fever can create complications.

asthmaaustralia.org.au/asthmaindisguise  #AsthmaInDisguise
Asthma and Hay Fever (Allergic Rhinitis): An information sheet for Pharmacies

Asthma and hay fever are closely linked, both characterized by inflammation and sensitivity throughout the respiratory system. Asthma affects 2.5 million Australians. About 80% of people with asthma also have hay fever and between 15% to 30% of people with hay fever also have asthma.¹

Managing hay fever and allergy is part of asthma care and improving asthma control. Better control and management of hay fever has been shown to improve asthma control in both adults and children.²,⁷,⁸,⁹

People with asthma and hay fever experience:
- Increased number of asthma flare-ups
- Increased number of visits to their GP and asthma-related hospitalisations
- More time off work or school
- Higher annual medical costs²,³,⁴

Hay fever can also result in:
- Disturbed sleep
- Daytime tiredness
- Recurrent headaches
- Poor concentration
- Increased risk of ear infections in children
- Recurrent sinus infections in adults

Common symptoms of hay fever are:
- Itchy nose or eyes
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Blocked nose
- Throat clearing
- Snoring

If people present with symptoms of asthma or hay fever e.g. cough, wheeze or sneeze in the pollen season, they may be susceptible to thunderstorm asthma. Discuss asthma and hay fever and the medications used to treat these conditions. It is also recommended they visit their GP to have symptoms checked, get a proper diagnosis and a written Asthma Action Plan and/or an Allergic Rhinitis (hay fever) Treatment Plan.

Treatments for asthma and hay fever:
- Most patients with asthma should be taking a regular inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) containing preventer, to minimise their symptoms and markedly reduce their risk of flare-ups.⁵
- Use of even a low dose of ICS, if taken regularly, reduces the risk of asthma-related death by 50–85%.⁶
- Intranasal corticosteroids are the most effective treatment for hay fever and can improve all symptoms, especially nasal congestion.
- Saline sprays/irrigation solutions can also be used to help clear nasal congestion and pressure, wash away dust and other irritants and soothe the lining of the nose.

- Oral antihistamines are effective against symptoms of rhinorrhea, sneezing, nasal itching and eye symptoms, but are less effective for nasal congestion.⁷

Community pharmacy has a key role to play in supporting people with asthma and hay fever.

Key tips for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Assistants:
- Check for a diagnosis of hay fever or asthma when dispensing asthma or hay fever medication – ask people with asthma and/or hay fever if they experience symptoms of the eyes, nose, throat or lungs.
- Discuss hay fever symptoms and treatment options with people with asthma.
- Demonstrate and check delivery device technique for asthma medications and/or intranasal sprays. Read the Asthma Medications and Devices brochure at www.asthmaaustralia.org.au for more information.
- Assess level of asthma control – Use the Asthma Control Test™ available at www.asthmaaustralia.org.au.
- Check for a written Asthma Action Plan or Allergic Rhinitis (hay fever) Treatment Plan.

Recommend people with co-existing asthma and hay fever to see their GP if:
- Persistent (≥ 4 days per week and ≥ 4 weeks)¹⁰, moderate to severe symptoms of hay fever are present - see the Australian Asthma Guidelines for classification of hay fever www.asthmahandbook.org.au/clinical-issues/allergies/allergic-rhinitis
- Symptoms are suggestive of uncontrolled asthma in people with a diagnosis – is their Asthma Control Score 19 or less?
- Hay fever symptoms are not well controlled by self-management with over-the-counter medicines (e.g. S2 intranasal corticosteroids, oral antihistamines).
- Hay fever treatment is required for more than four weeks at a time.
- There are complications (e.g. pain, loss of hearing or sense of smell, persistent cough)

Visit the Australian Asthma Guidelines for further information about managing allergic rhinitis in people with asthma: www.asthmahandbook.org.au/clinical-issues/allergies/allergic-rhinitis

Download Asthma Australia’s Asthma App – a patient education tool to help support and educate people with asthma from the iTunes app store.

Refer your patients with asthma to Asthma Australia’s Patient Education Referral Service – visit www.asthmaustralia.org.au/coach