

## Meeting the Challenges of Asthma

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways, characterized by episodes of bronchial hyperreactivity and airflow obstruction during periods of poor control or exacerbation. Advances in science over the last 3 decades have increased our understanding of asthma's mechanisms, medication regimens, and treatment strategies, but despite this increase in knowledge and advances in treatment options, the prevalence of asthma continues to increase and is associated with substantial daily functional morbidity.

The ultimate goal of effective asthma care is patient self-management that reduces the impact of the disease on functional daily morbidity and improves the patient's activities of daily living and quality of life. Evidence-based medicine, or at the very least, good clinical science, is important in establishing quality asthma care. Asthma crosses all genders, ages, and races across the entire spectrum of care.

This 41st RESPIRATORY CARE Journal Conference was designed to address these issues with a focus on the role of respiratory therapists in diagnosis and management. Coincidentally, the conference was held within a few days of the release of the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program's Expert Panel Report 3, Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma,<sup>1</sup> which we incorporated into the context of a broad state-of-the-art review.

As in previous Journal Conferences, invited speakers presented on specific topics, and discussion followed each presentation. This and the next issue of RESPIRATORY CARE contain the papers developed from these presentations, along with transcripts of the discussions. The conference summary in the June 2008 issue will provide a concise

overview of the key points presented. We hope these papers will stimulate discussion, comment, and ultimately transformation of daily practice, as well as inspire the interest of the respiratory therapy community to pursue better clinical practice strategies and patient outcomes for asthma patients across the entire continuum of care.

It was a pleasure to chair this 41st RESPIRATORY CARE Journal Conference, which is the first specifically dedicated to the diagnosis, management, and treatment of asthma. No other professionals are better prepared or present in all areas of care in which asthma appears than are respiratory therapists. We thank the conference faculty, whose outstanding presentations and lively discussions were conducted in a collegial and energetic spirit across the conference's two and a half days. We also acknowledge the generosity and support of the conference sponsors, through their unrestricted educational grants, which permitted us to bring together this exceptional faculty. Finally, we thank the American Respiratory Care Foundation for their organization and ongoing support of these educational conferences.

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### REFERENCE

1. Expert panel report 3: guidelines for the diagnosis and management of asthma. Bethesda MD: National Institutes of Health, National Asthma Education and Prevention Program; 2007. NIH Publication No. 08-4051. Available from <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/asthgdln.pdf>. Accessed February 12, 2008.

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Neil R MacIntyre MD FAARC has been a consultant for Trudell Medical and for Viasys. Timothy R Myers RRT-NPS has served on the advisory board of Cardinal Health and been a member of the speaker's bureau for Sepracor. The authors report no other conflicts of interest in the content of this foreword.