Solution to Pollution: An Attack on Asthma

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Abstract
In the current healthcare system and state of environmental pollution, individuals with chronic conditions are subject to exacerbations that decrease their quality of life. Air quality and the high levels of pollution in concentrated urban cities have an ostensibly dire effect on individuals with respiratory conditions, particularly asthma. We propose the implementation of personal air pollution monitoring devices into healthcare research (leading towards FDA approval) and eventually into part of the typical plan of care for someone with asthma. Currently, the Environmental Protection Agency's stationary monitors are sometimes unable to determine the safety of air quality in the places where people work and live. Personal air pollution monitoring devices would be able to combat this gap in quality data, thus having the ability to prevent asthma exacerbations through an upstream preventative measure that gives patients more control over their chronic condition.

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Bird's Eye View Proposal Details

Who has recognized the problem?
- The World Health Organization identifies asthma as a major noncommunicable disease affecting 262 million adults and children globally, causing over 460,000 deaths in 2019 (WHO, 2021)

How long has this been going on?
- The CDC recognizes that millions of Americans suffer from asthma-related healthcare difficulties; this is particularly true in communities with inadequate healthcare access
- The CDC has created a National Asthma Control Program which aims to help with asthma treatment, management, and control (CDC, n.d.)

Social Determinants of Asthma
- Prevalence
  - All U.S. adults experience asthma-related deaths each day (AAFA, n.d.)

- Health Disparities
  - Black Americans are five times more likely to go to the emergency room for asthma-related incidences and five times more likely to experience asthma-related deaths compared to white Americans (AAFA, n.d)

- Economic Costs
  - From 2008-2013, Americans paid an estimated $50.3 billion dollars in medical costs related to asthma, which is only expected to increase (Nurmagambetov et al., 2018)

- The high cost of asthma medications heavily impacts people of lower socioeconomic status because they are less likely to have health insurance coverage

Environmental Inequalities
- Increases in outdoor air pollution have caused increased rates of pre-existing asthma exacerbations, especially in urban populations with higher rates of both asthma and air pollution (Guarneri & Raimis, 2014)
- People of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to live in concentrated urban neighborhoods with higher rates of bad air quality

PERSONAL AIR POLLUTION MONITORING DEVICES

What are they?
- Low-cost portable pollution sensors that can be carried or worn by an individual during their daily activities. They can help prevent asthma exacerbations

Why is this significant?
- Air pollution is extremely harmful to global health, but it is particularly detrimental to those with underlying conditions such as asthma

- These individuals are disproportionately affected by the fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), nitrogen dioxide, ozone, carbon monoxide, and traffic-related air pollutants and can trigger exacerbations of the disease (Xue et al., 2021)

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) utilizes high-sensitive and effective air monitors, but they are not well suited to individual needs due to their locations not coinciding with the locations that expose individuals

- Personal air monitoring devices can measure pollution levels in all areas of the United States, and the EPA’s stationary monitors can’t

- They can help people with asthma control exacerbations, especially those living in disadvantaged areas with higher levels of pollution

How can we take action?
1. Contribute to asthma research by conducting structured interviews with adults with asthma to see if they'd be willing to use a personal air monitoring device
2. Conduct a study in a city with high pollution rates where half of the participants are given personal air monitoring devices and the other half must rely on the data from the EPA's stationary monitors. Compare and contrast the results. Ask the question: do these help prevent asthma exacerbations?
3. Consider asking large research groups with more resources to conduct a study, that could then be presented to the appropriate people to begin the FDA approval process
4. In due time, make personal air monitoring devices available to patients with persistent asthma. This could be something they are given at their primary care provider's office, or even sent home with after a hospital stay like an incentive spatula
5. Include personal pollution monitors into an asthma plan of care: how to track symptoms and triggers, how to take your medications, what to do when you have an attack, when to see your providers, and what to do when the air quality could trigger an exacerbation.

Fine particles (PM 2.5)
pollution can cause:
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing, coughing
- Chest pain
- Fatigue

Fine particles can make these conditions worse:
- Cardiovascular and heart disease
- Asthma and COPD

Ground-level ozone pollution can cause:
- Difficulty breathing deeply
- Shortness of breath
- Sore throat
- Wheezing, coughing
- Fatigue

Ozone can make these conditions worse
- Asthma and COPD
- Emphysema

Proposed Solutions

Applicability of the Proposed Solution
- With the proper research action, implementing personal pollution monitoring devices should be a new normal in patients suffering from severe asthma

Potential Implementation Issues
- The problem that could be encountered involves insurance coverage of these devices. By advocating to implement these devices, insurance companies could start developing and encouraging preventative care. This will then progress the idea of preventative care and better the health of populations.

Moving Forward

Further Innovation in Health Equality or Research
- The proposed solution could spark research regarding preventative measures for chronic respiratory illnesses such as asthma, thus decreasing the great need for treatments locally, nationally, and globally

What happens next?
- Recognition of safety devices for upstream, preventative health measures would encourage similar initiatives with various healthcare-related issues
- Advocating for FDA approval and insurance coverage of preventative healthcare devices could move insurance companies in the direction of encouraging preventative care coverage
- Foraying in equilibrium healthcare coverage will reduce costs in healthcare spending, improving the lives of those with asthma and other chronic illnesses, and reduce the need for downstream pharmacological interventions and therapies
- While a personal pollution monitor cannot solve the systemic issues that face our healthcare system, they can aid in improving the lives of individual people, children, and their communities
- In time, see less strain on the healthcare system and less children and adults affected by asthma