



“Why can’t I Breathe?”

Can’t breathe? Tired all the time? Southwest General’s new Pulmonary Hypertension Center may be able to help.

by **KenMcEntee**
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Until recently, there was little that could be done for patients who suffer from Pulmonary Hypertension (PH). Defined as abnormally high blood pressure in the arteries of the lungs, this rare condition makes the right side of the heart work harder than normal to circulate blood to the lungs.

Although no cure has been found for PH, the condition can be treated with medication once it is diagnosed, says Touraj Taghizadeh, MD, a board-certified cardiologist on the Medical Staff at Southwest General and medical director of the hospital’s Heart Failure Disease Management Program. Treatment can reduce symptoms and slow the progression of the condition.

“The right side of the heart has to pump against that excess high blood pressure,” he says. “As that process continues for years, the right side of the heart will start to enlarge and dilate, and eventually fail. Right-sided heart failure is a less common condition than congestive heart failure, which is normally associated with failure of the left side of the heart.”

Left-sided heart failure is usually caused by heart valve disease, heart attack or other physical disorders.

“We’ve known about PH for a long time, but until recently, there wasn’t much we could do about it,” says Dr. Taghizadeh—who specializes in PH. “But there are finally some newer treatments available that can

do people some good. Awareness of PH is beginning to come to the forefront.”

Depending on how advanced a patient’s condition is, treatments can include oral medication, inhalers or a continuous IV and injections. Some of the treatments were developed up to 15 years ago; others have been used for three to four years.

“A big part of our new PH Center is identifying the patients who qualify for these treatments,” says Dr. Taghizadeh.

Like other medical conditions, early detection is important. The most common symptom of PH is shortness of breath during normal physical activities. Other symptoms can include chest pain and palpitations. The condition affects women more than men by a 4-to-1 ratio.

“There are hereditary factors involved in PH, but heredity is just one of many known risk factors for this condition,” Dr. Taghizadeh says. “Also, there is a connection to certain drugs, particularly some diet medications—like Fen-Phen—that were taken off the market many years ago. Those diet pills were associated with blood vessel and heart valve disorders. Anybody who was exposed to those diet pills who is having these symptoms should be checked for PH.”

Although no direct connection has been found between obesity and PH, some of the symptoms are the same.

“That’s why it can be so difficult to diagnose,” Dr. Taghizadeh says. “Many doctors tell patients they are just overweight,

and they don’t do the workup necessary to see whether PH might be the problem.”

PH in patients is rated in four classes of functionality:

- Class one refers to patients who have no physical limitations and can do most physical activities without symptoms.
- Class two implies a shortness of breath with normal physical activity.
- Class three patients show symptoms at less-than-ordinary activity.
- Class four patients show symptoms even when they are at rest.

Through Southwest General’s new PH Center, patients will have a series of tests, starting with measuring fatigue during a six-minute walk test. Other testing includes an EKG and an ultrasound of the heart. Blood pressure and oxygen levels may be measured using a heart catheter.

“It is a difficult diagnosis to make and usually takes three years from reporting of symptoms to diagnosis,” Dr. Taghizadeh explains. “It can be elusive to patients and physicians. That’s why we’re trying to make it more recognized. That’s the goal of our new PH Center.”

While medication can be helpful in treating people in early stages of PH, patients in advanced stages or those who don’t respond to medication may require transplant of the lungs and heart.

If you have any of the symptoms discussed—or have been treated for these, yet symptoms persist—consider making

an appointment at Southwest General’s Pulmonary Hypertension Center, by calling 1-877-SWG-BEAT (794-2328). A physician referral is not necessary. Since the treatment goal of PH is to control symptoms, the earlier you know a diagnosis, the better you will be able to improve those symptoms, quality of life and survival.

Starting to Breathe

Southwest General’s Pulmonary Hypertension Center in the Heart & Vascular Institute Specialty Center, is located in Building A, Suite 410, at the Main Campus, in Middleburg Heights. Through the PH Center, patients will:

- Meet with a board-certified cardiologist with expertise in pulmonary hypertension.
- Have a six-minute walk test.
- Have diagnostic testing, including an echocardiogram, EKG, labwork, chest X-ray, pulmonary function test, among others.
- Schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss test findings and additional testing, if necessary.

For additional information on Southwest General’s award-winning heart and vascular services through the Heart & Vascular Institute, visit www.swgeneral.com/Heart.



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