How Managing Asthma Got Easier

COMMUNITY MATTERS
By Allison Linville

Carrie Bates, Respiratory Therapist Manager at North Valley Hospital, has a personal connection with asthma. “I’m an asthmatic myself. I know what works for patients because it works for me too, in managing my disease.” Bates saw a need at North Valley Hospital for asthma education when she moved here over two years ago. She previously worked in Southeast Idaho, where she implemented the only asthma education program in that region of the state. “We had great success there—90% compliance—and when I arrived here, I saw a similar opportunity for education.” Her first person experience certainly helps to understand the need as well. “Being an asthmatic, I know how important it is to make some life changes to manage the disease better, and I wanted to use that experience to make a positive impact on the community here.”

The Department of Health and Human Services offers grants to assist hospitals in implementing asthma prevention programs. Bates knew she wanted to start the program at North Valley, so when she identified the available grant funds, she “jumped right on it,” she says. The Montana Asthma Control Program is a certified program that participates in evidence based care. Bates is proud to mention that North Valley Hospital was the first location to receive the certification of recognition from the Montana Asthma Control Group, and is also one of the primary hospitals to continue to operate the program while upholding the high standards set by the organization.

The asthma control program is free to anyone with asthma or asthma like symptoms, and includes an informative booklet and a one on one meeting with a Registered Respiratory Therapist to review personalized information about triggers, circumstances, and how to change a person’s environment to reduce asthma attacks. The teaching guidelines were developed by the National Asthma Education Prevention Program (NAEPP).

Bates presses that the program is preventative, and is offered to North Valley Hospital patients as a free wellness program. “We want to help prevent patients from being readmitted to the hospital and emergency rooms, so we teach them the techniques to help manage their asthma.” Also, she acknowledges that asthma is a life-threatening disease. “We often see children in the emergency room for asthma complications, and they are the population that is most at risk for serious consequences due to the disease. We want to help prevent any serious or life-threatening events by offering this education course and making people aware that there are techniques to help prevent asthma attacks. I hope to make managing asthma easier for the entire family.” Sometimes, even recognizing the symptoms of asthma in children can be a challenge. “Occasionally, when a child gets a cold or has a cough, that can trigger asthma,” says Bates. “Parents will say, ‘Oh, they just have a cough,’ or ‘They have lots of allergies,’ but actually those symptoms can both be indicative of asthma.”

Bates explains that North Valley Hospital has been certified for just one year. In that time, the respiratory program was evaluated at the beginning and the end of the year. Some areas showed great improvement, while some didn’t improve as much as Bates had hoped. “We’ve been running the program for just a year and were really impressed by the initial results. We’re working to see improvement in all areas of evaluation, and the department is determined to work toward that goal.”

The Montana Asthma Control Program can be ordered by North Valley physicians when someone is in the emergency room or is an inpatient, and asthma is diagnosed or suspected. The program has also been expanded to the North Country Medical Clinic in Eureka and will soon be brought to the North Valley Professional Center in Columbia Falls.

For more information, please contact the North Valley Hospital Respiratory Care department at (406) 863-3570 or visit nvhosp.org. MW