

Number of individuals with asthma in Ontario increases

Toronto, ON (October 21, 2010) – A new study in the American Journal of Epidemiology, led by Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre researcher and Respirologist, Dr. Andrea Gershon and The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) researcher, Dr. Teresa To, suggests that there has been a startling increase in the number of people living with asthma in Ontario since 1996.

Using a validated definition of asthma, all individuals with asthma living in Ontario were identified from health administrative databases for the province. Annual asthma prevalence, incidence and mortality rates were then estimated from 1996 to 2005. Drs. Gershon and To found that during this time, the number of individuals with asthma increased by 70.5%.

While the number of new adults who developed asthma was relatively stable, their analysis observed that the number of children who developed asthma during this time increased by about 30%.

“The overall increase in asthma rates in the province is largely due to the significant increase in the number of children who are developing asthma and people living longer with the disease,” says Dr. Gershon. “Such a dramatic increase, especially in children, is concerning. We need to do more research to determine why it is occurring and how it can be reversed.”

Says Dr. To, “The increase in asthma could be partly attributed to early recognition of the disease which is important as it will lead to better treatment and understanding of the disease.”

The authors indicate that the high burden of asthma could be mitigated by effective clinical and public health strategies to prevent and manage asthma in the population. This includes measures such as ensuring individuals with asthma receive asthma education, understand asthma triggers and symptoms and take asthma medications.

Dr. Gershon, who is also an Adjunct Scientist at SickKids and Assistant Professor with the Departments of Medicine and Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto, states, “We wanted to call attention to this issue because, to date, little has been known about asthma trends. We hope that this information will help health-care providers and policy makers prepare for the burden of asthma and optimize solutions for people with asthma accordingly.

“While the biggest increase of new asthma cases is observed in children, we must recall that they have long lives ahead of them,” says Dr. To, Senior Scientist in the Child Health Evaluative Sciences program at SickKids Research Institute and Professor in the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, Departments of Paediatrics, Health Policy, Management and Evaluation and Paediatrics and Institute for Medical Sciences at the University of Toronto.. “This means we have an increasing population of children and adults living longer with their asthma. Proper management of asthma is key to prevent the potentially huge burden on individuals, on families, on communities and on the health care system”.

The study was supported by The Asthma Plan of Action, The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care. The results of the study are published in the September 2010 issue of the American Journal of Epidemiology.

About Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre is inventing the future of health care for the one million patients the hospital cares for each year through the dedication of its more than 10,000 staff and volunteers. An internationally recognized leader in research and education and a full affiliation with the University of Toronto distinguishes Sunnybrook as one of Canada's premier academic health sciences centres. Sunnybrook specializes in caring for Canada's war veterans, high-risk pregnancies, critically-ill newborns, adults and the elderly, and treating and preventing cancer, cardiovascular disease, neurological and psychiatric disorders, orthopaedic and arthritic conditions and traumatic injuries.

About The Hospital for Sick Children

The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) is recognized as one of the world's foremost paediatric health-care institutions and is Canada's leading centre dedicated to advancing children's health through the integration of patient care, research and education. Founded in 1875 and affiliated with the University of Toronto, SickKids is one of Canada's most research-intensive hospitals and has generated discoveries that have helped children globally. Its mission is to provide the best in complex and specialized family-centred care; pioneer scientific and clinical advancements; share expertise; foster an academic environment that nurtures health-care professionals; and champion an accessible, comprehensive and sustainable child health system. SickKids is proud of its vision of *Healthier Children. A Better World.*™ For more information, please visit www.sickkids.ca.

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