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Lung disease patients needed for new treatment study

South Tyneside lung disease patients are being encouraged to join in a UK-wide study to see if an old drug can help a relatively new drug work better as a treatment for a common lung condition.

South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust is one of only a handful of centres involved in the vital research and it is looking for people with the lung disorder Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), previously called chronic bronchitis and emphysema, to take part. COPD is the sixth leading cause of death in the UK, causing 28,000 deaths a year. The condition causes narrowing of the airways which, in turn, causes breathing problems and often a persistent cough and chest infections. There is no cure for COPD, which costs the NHS £1 billion per year, and it can be hard to treat.

Based on laboratory and pre-clinical work, the researchers are using low doses of a drug called theophylline, in conjunction with the inhaled steroids already used today. Theophylline used to be used to treat COPD on its own but its use at high dose as a drug to open up airways has declined with the development of new, inhaled treatments.

Consultant Respiratory Physician Dr Liz Fuller, who is leading the latest research at South Tyneside District Hospital, said: "COPD is an unpleasant condition, which can cause much suffering, and current treatments are limited. Inhaled steroids, like those used to treat asthma, are used to tackle COPD but, unlike their effectiveness with asthma, the airways of people with COPD are somewhat resistant to steroids and we have been using relatively high doses as a result. We want to test the theory that low doses of theophylline will act on the airways, helping the inhaled steroids already used widely in COPD today to work far more effectively."

Early indications are positive, she added. "So far, the patients who we have recruited seem to have benefited from it. Several have reported feeling much better, although we do not know yet which of them are receiving the placebo. Generally, however, I think they welcome the extra support which comes with taking part in research."

Around 1,400 volunteer patients are required for the study, which is funded by the NHS's own research funds from the Health Technology Assessment Programme.

Dr Fuller said: "We want to recruit people with COPD who have had two or more exacerbations – episodes, usually caused by infection, when the disease suddenly worsens – in the previous year. We will then see if the combination of drugs can make a difference to patients in whom the resultant decline in lung function can mean reduced quality of life and admission to hospital. Current recruitment stands at eight patients but, with the appointment of a part-time, dedicated respiratory research nurse, we are hoping to significantly improve on this number."



Potential South Tyneside volunteers and those wishing to find out more about the study, known as TWICS (Theophylline With Inhaled Corticosteroids), should ring respiratory research nurse Nadia Elkaram or clinical trials officer Judith Moore on 0191 4041000, extension 2263.
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Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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