Learn about COPD

Many people have heard the term COPD but aren’t aware that it is an acronym for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a condition that makes it difficult to breathe. COPD is actually used to describe a number of lung-damaging conditions, the most common being emphysema and chronic bronchitis. Individuals who have COPD may find that their ability to function normally decreases over time. Eventually, they may lose their ability to perform everyday tasks such as walking.

The most common cause of COPD is inhalation of a lung irritant like tobacco smoke (including secondhand smoke), air pollution and chemical fumes.

Here are some common symptoms of COPD:
✦ Frequent bouts of the common cold or flu
✦ Frequent coughing (“smoker’s cough”) and wheezing
✦ Chest tightness, difficulty catching one’s breath
✦ Swelling of the feet, ankles and legs

COPD in its early stages often goes unnoticed by those who have it. This is partly because most of the people who have the condition are over 40. As a result, people who have COPD symptoms such as weakness or shortness of breath may just figure that these are signs of aging. Others may assume that they have allergies or are just prone to catching colds.

If you or someone you care about has some of these symptoms, seeing a doctor is very important. Early treatment for COPD and lifestyle modifications can make a difference in both life quality and expectancy.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your gift of life. May I be ever mindful of this gift and never take it for granted. Amen.

Faith community support for those with COPD

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) is an on-going condition that frequently worsens as it progresses. This means that the needs of someone having COPD will change over time. Living with COPD, or caring for someone with this condition, can be challenging. And because COPD is an invisible disability, people may not realize that someone with the condition is ill and has limitations and needs special accommodations, complicating things further.

Faith communities have a role to play in supporting people with this condition. Here are some ideas:
✦ Support smoking-cessation efforts through education and support groups.
✦ Avoid or minimize the use of incense in services as burning can contribute to lung irritation in people living with COPD.
✦ Be sensitive to the limitations of someone with COPD and encourage volunteers and members to set healthy boundaries regarding their activities.
✦ Help people living with COPD with everyday tasks, such as shopping, getting to appointments and preparing meals.
✦ Pay attention to air quality reports and reach out to COPD sufferers with offers of assistance on bad days.
✦ Make faith community buildings as accessible as possible. People with COPD may have difficulty walking for even short distances or climbing stairs. Installing elevators or chair lifts and making sure they are in good working order demonstrates that a faith community remains welcoming and inclusive.
✦ Educate members about invisible disabilities. People who look healthy may be struggling with significant challenges. When people become aware of hidden disabilities, they are less likely to judge others.
✦ Promote sound environmental stewardship. Air quality has a huge impact on people living with COPD and other respiratory disorders.

Resources: