

Pulmonary Hypertension

General

- Pulmonary hypertension (PH) is a simplified name for a complex health problem—continuous high blood pressure in the pulmonary artery in the lungs, resulting in an enlarged heart which can also lose its ability to pump.
- It is a disease that affects people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds although some people are more prone to developing PH.
- PH is broken down into two main categories:
 - PH which occurs as a separate entity, either sporadically or due to genetic inheritance.
 - PH which occurs as part of other illnesses including scleroderma, sickle cell anemia, lupus, chronic liver disease, and HIV – or use of diet drugs such as Fen-phen.

Diagnosis & Symptoms

- PH is often not recognized until the disease is quite advanced.
- PH is often not diagnosed in a timely manner because its early symptoms can often be attributed to those of many other conditions. Some of the symptoms of PH include:
 - Chest pain
 - Low energy
 - Swollen ankles and legs
 - Breathlessness
 - Dizziness and fainting
 - Bluish lips and skinThese symptoms may seem common and simple, but they severely impair a PH patient's ability to lead a normal life. Simple activities like walking, dressing oneself, and cleaning can become difficult to perform. Thus, a normal, healthy-looking individual might be incapable of some basic functions due to PH.
- Although there are *over 100,000* people known to suffer from PH, there may be thousands of others whose symptoms have yet to be diagnosed. Many people may have PH without knowing it or are *misdiagnosed* with illnesses such as asthma or bronchitis, delaying proper treatment.

Treatments

- Until 1990, there were no accepted treatments for PH, but today patients have several options to discuss with their doctors, although there is still no known cure.
- The treatment that has been in use the longest is not only very *expensive*, but it is also highly *invasive*, requiring the use of a pump that continuously administers medicine directly into the heart by means of an indwelling catheter, making it difficult for most PH patients to:
 - hold down regular jobs and maintain a stable financial situation;
 - travel because of the difficulty with wheelchairs, oxygen supplies, and security; or
 - control nausea and vomiting due to side effects.
- The goals of treatment for patients with PH, which includes medications, oxygen, and transplantation, are to:
 - Treat the underlying cause;
 - Reduce symptoms and improve quality of life;
 - Slow the development of blood clots; and
 - Increase the blood and oxygen supply to the heart, reducing its workload.

Prognosis

- Recent data indicate that the length of survival is continuing to improve, with some patients able to manage the disease 15 to 20 years or longer. With increased funding and more research, there can be a better life expectancy for those living with PH.
- Much new research is underway, including basic and genetic studies, unraveling the molecular mysteries of the disease process, and the development of new medical treatments. It is not difficult to believe that a cure for PH can be found.