Obstructive Sleep Apnea and COPD- The Impact of Overlapping Syndrome

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COPD - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and OSA- Obstructive Sleep Apnea are two conditions when combined are referred to as Overlapping Syndrome. Overlapping Syndrome can significantly impact life due to the symptoms, disease process and comorbidities that arise. Both conditions can cause significant decompensation which may result in death. Overlapping syndrome must be managed appropriately to improve overall health and well-being. This article will address both conditions and their impact on life.

OSA - Obstructive Sleep Apnea occurs when there is a pause in breathing or breathing becomes shallow. Cessation of airflow due to an obstruction in the airway. This occurs when the muscles in the back of the throat relax/collapse, thus minimizing passage of air. These events are known as Apneas or Hypopneas. Events occur due to airway obstruction causing you to gag, gasp, and snore. Hypoxemia is a result thus causing the heart to work harder. You awaken tired, irritated and unrested. Is OSA a serious concern? Does it affect the body, health and life? Can it impede activities of daily living? Can this condition cause death? The answer is yes. Death may be the result of the symptoms and comorbidities which present from this condition. Unfortunately, it may only be a matter of time for the disease to progress to the end.

COPD - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, is a lung disease that causes difficulty breathing due to the loss of lung elasticity and clogged or narrow airways. Emphysema and Chronic Bronchitis fall under the COPD Umbrella causing significant difficulty to ventilate and oxygenate. Emphysema occurs when the tiny air sacs in the lungs are damaged making it difficult to breathe in or out. In healthy lungs the air sacs move air. Emphysema causes loss of elasticity. Moving air in/out becomes difficult. Chronic Bronchitis occurs when there is inflammation of the bronchial tubes which are the airways that allow passage of air to the lungs. The bronchial tubes become blocked or narrow due to mucus production and inflammation, thus causing shortness of breath. Is there relief from the storm that encompasses the body? Is COPD reversible? Is there a healing process that can be followed to resolve the distress from within? So many questions to think about, however the answers are not appealing. COPD is a lung disease that cannot be reversed. It gradually worsens until the struggle to breathe ends life.

When COPD and OSA overlap one another, the effects of symptoms, health concerns and comorbidities significantly increase due to the combination. Comorbidities such as heart disease, pulmonary hypertension, Diabetes, Stroke, hypoxemia and hypercapnia arise resulting in a spiral decompensation. Unfortunately, resolution may not be an option as the condition worsens. Bronchodilator therapy, corticosteroids and non-invasive positive airway pressure may help manage the disease process, lessen the struggle to breathe and help maintain a baseline. Supportive intervention and compassionate care is a necessity to help maintain dignity. Life may be a constant struggle until the body can no longer sustain itself.

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