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ER starts asthmatic children on right path, study finds

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - When children with asthma are seen in the emergency room, the doctors there can at least start them on maintenance medication that can help prevent future flare-ups, according to a report in the medical journal Pediatrics.

Dr. Heather K. Lehman from the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, New York and colleagues evaluated a pediatric emergency department-based program designed to create a new role for the ER physician.

Forty children with persistent asthma were provided sample anti-inflammatory medications, and a letter outlining the treatment plan was faxed to the patient's primary care physician the next day. It was up to the primary care physician to prescribe ongoing anti-inflammatory medication.

Twenty-eight of the patients followed up with their primary care physicians, the authors report, and the anti-inflammatory medication was continued in 21 of them.

Overall, one third continued on a long-term anti-inflammatory "controller" medication after they were seen in the emergency department.

"We were pleased with our results, since all these patients prior to the study were not on anti-inflammatory therapy," Lehman told Reuters Health. "So even a small change in controller medication use could translate into large gains in patient care, outcomes, and economics."

SOURCE: Pediatrics, December 2006.

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