

The Benefits of Emotional Support for People with COPD

by Jo-Von Tucker

*“A man wrapped up in himself makes a
very small bundle.”*
~ Benjamin Franklin

This is a subject that I have written about before... but I find that it continually needs more emphasis. Each time a new study comes out about emotional support and its importance in successfully rehabilitating patients with chronic illness, I am impressed all over again with the published results.

The most recent findings shared information about a study that proved that female heart patients who live alone are *three times more likely to die* from subsequent complications and attacks than those patients who have loving, caring spouses (well spouses) or caregivers.

Another long-term study reported that cancer patients had their lives extended by an average of eighteen months, just by joining and participating in support groups.

What, you might ask, do these studies have to do with *me*? I am not a heart patient, or, I don't have cancer -- I have lung disease!

But in some ways, it doesn't matter what the disease is. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is an illness that results in devastating lifestyle changes for the patient. From the time we are diagnosed until the time we die, we are constantly faced with compromises and adjustments in our lives, often resulting in the loss of independence and self-esteem. Each time another enjoyable activity is taken away from us because of our physical restrictions and shortness of breath, it is a loss that is mourned and deeply felt.

Understanding and caring are key elements in helping us find the strength to carry on our battle with lung disease. Those folks who do not find emotional support from a spouse, from family members, or from other caregivers run the danger of just fading away, too exhausted to get dressed and leave the house to maintain any social interaction, and probably too depressed to even try!

Involvement in a COPD Support Group provides an alternative to that scenario. It promises a forum for learning opportunities and support for people with lung disease. Its membership is made up of people who share the same symptoms, similar diagnoses, concerns, issues and prognoses. It is a privilege to be able to come to the monthly meetings... to listen, to talk, to learn, to exchange experiences, and to share feelings with those who truly do understand how we feel.

It is also a commitment to ourselves, that we are going to work to get better, or to remain stable. It is a commitment we should be happy to make, for the results of our active involvement will far outweigh our effort. In this case, the old saying really applies; You get more out of it, than you put into it!

The support group won't take the place of a loving spouse or child, but it will add a whole new dimension of positive emotional interaction for COPD'ers. And I firmly believe that we need all the help we can get!

So, here's to all of you who make your own support group what it is... all the diversity, degrees of illness, fighting spirit, encouragement and devotion to one another. Together, we are an outstanding group of people who can share each other's concerns, and can be there for one another while still conducting our own private battles life for breath.

