



Let's Talk About Chronic Cough: A Perspective from Patient Advocacy Partners

Approximately 5% of adults in the United States live with chronic cough, a cough lasting longer than 8 weeks. People with the condition commonly cough in “bouts” they cannot control, and usually feel a strong urge to cough or a tickle in their throat before a coughing bout starts.

Leaders from *The Cough Chronicles*' group of patient advocacy partners, including Bev Stewart, National Senior Director of Health Promotions at the American Lung Association (Lung Association), Kathy Przywara, Vice President of Community at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), and Tonya Winders, President and Chief Executive Officer at the Allergy & Asthma Network (AAN), share their perspectives and shed light on the impact chronic cough may have on the daily lives of people living with the condition.

Q: What challenges do people living with chronic cough experience? What can be done to help reduce those challenges?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** I have met people who have been living with chronic cough for 10, 20 and 30 years, and they tell me about the ways it affects their health — from dizziness and headaches, to physical exhaustion and sleep disturbances. Understandably, this can take a toll on a person's emotional and physical well-being.

A common theme I have heard from patients is how disruptive this condition can be because they never know when they are going to start coughing. Will a coughing bout start while watching a movie at the theater or in the middle of a fancy dinner? How do they handle it — do they stay where they are or excuse themselves? Do they avoid activities where persistent coughing may bother others? People living with chronic cough tell me they have to answer these questions all the time. I see how this can be frustrating and isolating. Patients tell me they want someone to listen and acknowledge what they are going through.

- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** Through conversations with patients, I understand that chronic cough can be irritating, frustrating and at times embarrassing. Getting a timely diagnosis is one of the biggest challenges I've seen, as there are many possible underlying causes of chronic cough that need to be investigated and the process may involve seeing multiple specialists. I think it's important for people with chronic cough to receive a diagnosis so they can start to understand the condition and ways to address it.

Q: What do those living with chronic cough tell you about how the condition affects their relationships or impacts family members?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** Many patients with chronic cough tell me that the condition has progressively affected their relationship with various family members. For example, one woman explained that her husband doesn't sleep in the same room as her anymore because her coughing is too disruptive and wakes him up at night.
- **Tonya Winders, AAN:** My grandmother had a chronic cough my entire life. When I was young, I remember that she tended to avoid social settings, like church, where she had to be quiet. She used to love playing cards and bridge with her friends, going to the senior center and playing pinochle and rook, but I slowly watched her stop all of that and just hole up in her house alone. Eventually, this isolation contributed to her inability to fully engage in our family functions. Through my grandmother, I've experienced the social isolation that one can feel with chronic cough, which can impact the family, as well.

Q: What are the best ways family/friends of those living with chronic cough can help and offer support to their loved ones?

- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** I think one of the best things family and friends can do is show patience and be understanding. Chronic cough can be exhausting for the person living with the condition because they can't just "stop" coughing. It's important for family and friends to provide a listening ear for support. For those living with chronic cough, voicing their frustrations in a supportive environment may be helpful.
- **Tonya Winders, AAN:** I believe family and friends of someone who may have chronic cough should encourage their loved one to seek the care they need, stay persistent in their search for a diagnosis and remain engaged in social and daily activities they enjoy. People with chronic cough should also be encouraged to advocate for themselves — have an open conversation with their healthcare provider about how chronic cough is impacting them without minimizing or dismissing it. I've also found it helpful to tell that person how much you love them and that you don't care if people give you looks when you're out together — you just want to be with them, experience life with them and value the time you spend together, no matter what.

Q: Why do you think it's important to collaborate with Merck on *The Cough Chronicles*? What do you hope people take away from it?

- **Bev Stewart, Lung Association:** The great thing about *The Cough Chronicles* is that it helps people understand that they are not alone. I have seen first-hand how people find relief in knowing that there are others out there with shared experiences.
- **Kathy Przywara, AAFA:** It is important for people with chronic cough to know that there are resources out there that can help them better understand the condition, which is why we're excited to continue to partner with Merck on *The Cough Chronicles*.
- **Tonya Winders, AAN:** For AAN, joining *The Cough Chronicles* is about validating chronic cough as a real condition and ensuring people know where to go for additional information. We also hope to help reduce the stigma associated with chronic cough.



Bev Stewart is the National Senior Director of Health Promotions at the American Lung Association and oversees the organization's nationwide lung disease programs, supporting those with chronic cough through various initiatives.



Kathy Przywara is the Vice President of Community at the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America and leads community programming to help reduce the burden of disease and support those with chronic cough through advocacy, education and research.



Tonya Winders is the President and CEO of the Allergy & Asthma Network and works to advance nationwide efforts to engage, educate and empower Americans with chronic cough and various respiratory conditions.

