For immediate release

Early Pulmonary Fibrosis detection holds the key to better health outcomes for Canadians living with COVID-19 and rheumatoid arthritis.

Canadians who have had COVID-19, and other chronic diseases, are experiencing Pulmonary Fibrosis (PF) at significantly higher rates than others, seemingly providing a causal link that researchers are investigating.

February 28, 2024 (Etobicoke, ON). When is a cough, just a cough? And when is it more than that?

In recognition of Rare Disease Day, these are two simple questions the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation (CPFF) wants hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are dealing with long-term COVID-19 and other chronic illnesses to think about, because their life can truly depend on knowing the answer.

COVID-19 link with PF looms large for thousands of Canadians

Research is shedding light on the growing rate of pulmonary fibrosis (PF) being found in people suffering from long-term COVID-19. PF is a relatively unknown but deadly disease that involves irreversible scarring of lung tissue, slowly robbing a person of the ability to breathe, making it harder and harder for them to get oxygen from their lungs.

In an ominous sign that we can expect to see tens of thousands more cases of PF in Canada each year, research studies done across the world are discovering large numbers of people experiencing PF after contracting COVID-19. One study, ***Post COVID-19 pulmonary fibrosis; a meta-analysis study***, found that almost 45% (44.9%) of study participants began suffering from PF after contracting COVID-19.

Many with connective tissue diseases also more prone to PF

The researchers also show significant increases in PF for the hundreds of thousands of Canadians suffering from connective tissue diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, myositis, lupus and scleroderma. In a recent video, Dr Janet Pope, Head of Rheumatology at St. Joseph's Health Centre in London, Ontario, explains how likely each of these diseases is to progress to PF and the early symptoms both patients and healthcare professionals should be watching for.

“Tackle the Crackle” – Early detection makes a huge difference to PF patients

With this newfound connection, tens of thousands of Canadians have the potential to be diagnosed on top of the 30,000 who are currently identified with PF. Even before this recent finding, more than 2,500 Canadians were projected to die in 2024 from PF.

Early diagnosis is key to slowing down the disease, so primary care professionals as well as average Canadians need to know PF can start with these common symptoms:

- **Persistent cough that won't go away** after more than three months
- **Shortness of breath** after physical activity that was typically not a problem
- **Ongoing fatigue, weight loss**

CPFF's Tackle the Crackle campaign highlights the importance of having a physician listen to a person's lungs for the tell-tale crackle sound of PF for anyone experiencing one or more of these symptoms. In fact, Dr. Pope recommends physicians listen to the lungs of all patients who have a connective tissue disease like rheumatoid arthritis, myositis, or lupus every time they have an appointment.

"Why not listen each time?" she asks. "It only takes four seconds and might help catch people early," Dr. Pope says.

Early detection is vital because PF symptoms cannot be reversed by the treatment medication, only slowed down. More awareness by the public and medical professionals can result in earlier diagnosis so treatments can start sooner for patients at a less severe stage of the disease. Once a patient's lungs are too scarred, it causes challenges with daily activities at home and at work.

For other straightforward early detection tips, Canadians are urged to "***Know the Signs – Listen" with this short, animated video*** or scan the CPFF Patient Guide, a quick resource with details on PF testing types as well as medications used.

Dig deeper into the human side of Pulmonary Fibrosis

As a member of the media, you can discover more on the impacts and experience of living with PF, getting access to first-hand experience through:

- watching these patient videos
- an interview set up with a local patient, caregiver, or physician about the daily challenges they face
- taking the Pucker Up Challenge, a 10-second activity that is raising the eyebrows of people around the world to the everyday struggles that PF patients face
- reviewing the CPFF Online Media Kit or contacting media@cpff.ca

About Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation (CPFF)

The Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation is a registered Canadian Charitable Foundation established in 2009 to provide hope and support for people affected by pulmonary fibrosis. The organization educates Canadians about the disease, supports patients, families and caregivers and funds research to find treatments and a cure.

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