WOMEN WITH OXYGEN-DEPENDENT COPD HAVE HIGHER MORTALITY

Women with severe COPD who are on long-term oxygen therapy (LTOT) have higher mortality than men, warns a large study. The prevalence of COPD is rising among women and is approaching that of men, but it has previously been unclear as to whether sex affects survival. A seven-year prospective cohort study compared survival in 435 outpatients with COPD - 184 women, 251 men - referred for long-term oxygen therapy at two respiratory clinics in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Baseline data were collected on enrolment into oxygen therapy, when patients were clinically stable.

The researchers analysed the effect of gender on survival using Kaplan-Meier survival curves, and then used Cox proportional hazards models to control for potential confounders. Results showed that women were at more than 50% higher risk of death compared to men (hazard ratio, 1.54; 95% confidence interval, 1.15–2.07; p = 0.004) after adjusting for potential confounders (age, pack-years smoked, PaO₂, FEV₁ and body mass index). Other independent predictors of death were lower PaO₂ (p < 0.001) and lower body mass index (p < 0.05).

ACTION

The study demonstrates that women with COPD who are on long-term oxygen therapy are at higher risk of dying than men. The observed survival difference could have occurred if women were less likely to use their oxygen as prescribed than men - as has been seen in previous studies, making it worth taking efforts to encourage adherence. Another explanation for worse survival among women might be that some of the systemic complications of COPD, such as muscle dysfunction or depression, are more common in women and that these lead to worse outcomes. Management of women with COPD should obviously aim to treat these complications as effectively as possible.