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Beyond the “ABC approach”

To the Editors:

I read with interest the recent review by CELLI and BARNES [1], wherein the authors have beautifully discussed the aetiology, cellular and molecular mechanisms, management and new definition of exacerbations of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

In the management of acute exacerbations of COPD they have discussed the role of three classes of drugs (antibiotics, bronchodilators and corticosteroids, *i.e.* an “ABC approach”); however, the role of oxygen therapy, theophylline and supportive management is not mentioned. All of these have implications for the management of the disease.

Hypoxia at exacerbation of COPD is quite common and may be life threatening. The importance of controlled oxygen therapy during the management of acute exacerbation cannot be overlooked [2].

Theophylline is widely used in the management of stable patients with COPD. A recent meta-analysis evaluating the role of intravenous aminophylline in cases of acute exacerbation of COPD did not find any beneficial effect in terms of improvement of pulmonary function or symptoms [3]. However, the withdrawal of methylxanthines in patients already receiving them can worsen lung function, clinical status, exercise performance and ratings of dyspnoea [4]. Therefore, patients already receiving oral preparations of methylxanthines for stable disease should continue on such treatments at the time of exacerbation. The current Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) guidelines even suggest adding aminophylline to standard therapy for patients with moderate-to-severe exacerbations or those not responding to nebulised short-acting bronchodilators [5].

Appropriate fluid balance (with special attention to the administration of diuretics), nutritional aspects, anticoagulants,

and cardiovascular agents are the most complementary standard measures. Manual or mechanical chest percussion and postural drainage may be beneficial in patients producing >25 mL sputum per day or with lobar atelectasis.

A. Singh

Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, Christian Medical College and Hospital, Ludhiana, India.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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