

## **EVALUATING GERD: An “Unchecked” Epidemic**

### ***(Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease or Chronic Heartburn)***

#### **OVERVIEW**

- Occurs when the lower esophageal sphincter (LES) (muscle) malfunctions or does not close properly and stomach acid leaks back into the esophagus, causing a burning sensation in the chest or throat.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Anyone experiencing heartburn twice a week or more may have GERD.<sup>1</sup>
- Years of exposure to stomach acids can trigger changes in the lining of the esophagus.<sup>3,5</sup>
- GERD can lead to more serious health problems, like esophagitis, Barrett’s esophagus, and esophageal cancer.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Patients who have GERD generally report decreased quality of life, reduced productivity, and decreased well-being.<sup>7</sup>

#### **PREVALENCE**

- An estimated 61 million Americans, or 44% of the US adult population, have heartburn at least once a month.<sup>7</sup>
- More than 19 million people suffer from GERD and experience symptoms of GERD at least twice a week.<sup>8</sup>
- GERD is the third most prevalent disease in the US with the highest annual direct costs (\$9.3 billion/year).<sup>9</sup>

#### **GERD TREATMENT**

- 60% of heartburn sufferers do not consult their family physician regarding the condition.<sup>10</sup>
- Most effective treatment for GERD is proton pump inhibitors.<sup>11</sup>
- 15% of patients self-treat symptoms with antacids on a weekly basis.<sup>12</sup>
- Americans spend more than \$1 billion each year on antacids and acid suppressants.<sup>7</sup>

#### **DIAGNOSIS/SCREENING**

- Most GERD sufferers are not screened for more serious disease.<sup>7</sup>
- American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) recommends screening men over 50 every three years if they have a history of five years or more of chronic reflux and reflux symptoms at least two times a week.
- Evaluating people with a history of GERD can help detect Barrett’s esophagus, a dangerous pre-cancerous condition; 700,000 are reported to have Barrett’s esophagus, which is twice as common in men.<sup>3</sup>
- Evaluation consists of endoscopy either with a long plastic tube that is advanced down the throat to the esophagus or capsule endoscopy with the PillCam™ ESO, a noninvasive alternative.

#### **LONG-TERM COMPLICATIONS**

- GERD can lead to Barrett’s esophagus, which over time can lead to esophageal cancer, the fastest growing cancer in the US.<sup>1,13</sup>
- Incidence of esophageal cancer has increased five-fold in the last 30 years.

## REFERENCES

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- 12 <http://www.ascp.com/public/pubs/cc/1997/supp5.html>
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