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Managing Travel With PAH: Logistics, Medications, Oxygen, and Emergency Preparedness

Announcer:

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Dr. Kingman:

Hello. This is a CME on ReachMD, and I'm Martha Kingman.

Traveling with pulmonary arterial hypertension requires careful planning to ensure safety and avoid complications. In this brief lecture, I'm going to cover some logistics, medication management, how to travel with oxygen, how to avoid emergencies, and hopefully, all these things can help patients have some fun and safe travel.

The first thing I want to talk about is travel insurance. Generally, travel insurance can be beneficial, but it's important that patients really read the fine print and make sure that that insurance is going to cover any pulmonary hypertension emergencies or pulmonary hypertension hospitalizations. That's what we usually tell patients—just to be really careful about what they're paying for.

Choosing a destination is probably one of the most important aspects of travel for patients with pulmonary hypertension. In my experience, we have asked patients not to travel over 5,000 to 6,000 feet in altitude. Because with altitude, we know that oxygen levels get lower, and then patients can become more hypoxic or hypoxic if they weren't already. Some patients will, despite our best intentions to ask them to not travel to high altitude, do it anyway. And if they do do that, we make sure that they have plenty of oxygen with them and that they have a pulse oximeter and they're checking their oxygen levels very frequently and adjusting as needed.

The mode of transportation is important. If patients are flying on airplanes, even pressurized commercial planes, oxygen levels will get lower. So if the patient is already on oxygen, they need to, again, bring their oxygen concentrator with them and a pulse oximeter and adjust as needed throughout the flight. Also, it's important for patients to check with the airlines and make sure that they're not going to run into any trouble bringing their portable concentrator onto the flight.

Traveling by car also has some potential complications in that prolonged sitting for a long time increases the risk for blood clots, so we tell patients to be sure and stop frequently when they're traveling in their car on long road trips.

A little bit about medications. I always tell patients to bring 2x, twice the amount of medications and supplies that they think they may need on the trip and to not check them with their luggage. All medications and medical supplies should be in the carry-on bag because, as we all know, luggage will get lost at some point.

Another thing that's really helpful to have is a letter from the healthcare provider. So if you have a standard template that you can just have available for your patients that says patient X has pulmonary hypertension and they need to carry these medications with them. If it's a patient with an infusion pump, that they need to wear that pump the entire time through the TSA process and not be disconnected, and those sorts of things.

Another issue is the use of oxygen when patients get to their destination. Patients, of course, have an oxygen supplier, and we ask our patients to get in touch with their oxygen supplier and get a contact that is local to where they're going to be. Usually, the oxygen companies can refer to a company that's in the vicinity of where they're going to be to help with extra oxygen or refilling oxygen and that sort of thing.

Medical ID bracelets can be helpful. Some patients will get medical ID bracelets that say they have pulmonary arterial hypertension or that I have a pump that can't be discontinued. Or if they're on a blood thinner, it may say that they're on anticoagulations.

Another thing that we tell patients or often the patients are asking us, "What if I'm in town X? Who's the pulmonary hypertension provider there?" And what we'll do is go onto the Pulmonary Hypertension Association website, find a PAH-treating expert close to where they're going to be and make sure that they have that contact information. If they have flexibility, it's also a good idea if they are lodging or staying in the vicinity of a hospital that treats patients with pulmonary arterial hypertension, especially if they're on an infusion pump.

Okay, so in conclusion, these are just some of the things that we talk to patients about to ensure that they have safe travel and avoid complications. Really, careful planning, with making sure they have enough medications and so on, goes a long way to just making sure everything goes smoothly.

Thank you so much for attending.

Announcer:

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