

Hitting the Right Note with Harmonica Therapy

For most people, a harmonica is simply a musical instrument – perhaps an accompaniment to a favorite song or a staple of the blues. However, to a group of COPD patients in Bloomington, the instrument sounds like a path to better breathing.

People suffering from COPD, or chronic obstruction pulmonary disease, have a hard time breathing. It turns out that playing the harmonica can be a great therapy. The repeated pattern of breathing in and out through the instrument can help patients become aware of breathing patterns.

That is the idea of the support class, COPD Harmonica Therapy. Nancy Custer is the Manager of Cardiopulmonary Services at OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center. She started the class as an innovative way for her patients to exercise their lungs.

“It’s the only musical instrument where you not only have to draw in air, but you also have to blow out air to be able to create music. So it’s great therapy for people that have lung disease,” explained Custer.

The group of budding musicians meets once a month. According to COPD patient Steve Peterson, the therapy is not only a boon for his health, but also comes with a side of entertainment.

“It just helps you. It helps you breathe. And you know, it’s kind of fun,” said Peterson.

Custer agrees. She says the physical act of exercising the lungs isn’t the only benefit for these patients.

“People with chronic conditions are sometimes very isolated,” said Custer. “And if you come up with different ideas that bring people out of their homes, bring them around individuals that are experiencing the same type of chronic disease, it makes it more bearable to live with and also improves your quality of life.”

And for those who aren’t musically inclined, Peterson says there is nothing to worry about.

“We’re not going to be on Carnegie Hall. We’re not going on tour or anything,” he joked. Peterson added, “If you do practice, it’s not that hard of an instrument to play. So if you do practice, you can entertain your grandkids around the campfire.”

The free COPD Harmonica therapy group meets the third Tuesday of each month at the Center for Healthy Lifestyles at OSF St. Joseph Medical Center in Bloomington at 2:00 PM, and on the third Thursday of each month at OSF HealthCare Saint James-John W. Albrecht Medical Center in Pontiac at 2:30 PM. Call (309) 661-5151 for more information.

Harmonicas are supplied by the group, and you don’t need to have COPD to join.

To learn more about lung and pulmonary services OSF HealthCare provides, click [here](#).