

Increasing Access to Inhaled Medicines for COPD and Asthma

PATIENT STORIES

How do people living with COPD and asthma feel about inhaled medicines?

My Tortuous Journey with COPD

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I was born on 12 April, 1956, and began struggling with breathing problems in 1982 while still a student. **I experienced persistent cough, chest wheezing, and shortness of breath.** Initially diagnosed with asthma by my school medical centre in Enugu, I relied on salbutamol inhalers, theophylline tablets, and other medicines whenever attacks occurred.

As the years passed, my symptoms worsened and treatment costs rose. After moving to Lagos, I continued care at different facilities, receiving salbutamol and salmeterol/fluticasone inhalers, prednisolone and antihistamine tablets, and, during emergencies, nebulizer treatments and injections of aminophylline and hydrocortisone.

Unfortunately, I reacted badly to the salmeterol/fluticasone inhaler and prednisolone. In 2012, my case was reassessed at a tertiary center, where **I learned for the first time that I was not only dealing with asthma but also COPD.** Further evaluation revealed diabetes, a stomach ulcer, and high blood pressure.

Although I initially received good care there, I eventually had to stop attending because I was forced to relocate to a more affordable area. The long distance and rising transport costs made regular visits impossible.

I began receiving care at a nearby private facility, but my condition deteriorated. **The salbutamol inhaler I had depended on for decades suddenly stopped working.** Even repeated puffs provided no relief. Only intravenous injections of aminophylline and hydrocortisone brought temporary improvement.

Between 2019 and 2020, I was twice rushed to the hospital unconscious and woke up to find myself on a bed with an oxygen mask. My visits became so frequent that someone jokingly nicknamed me a “Resident Patient.”

At my lowest point, a cousin and his wife took me to a pulmonologist in November, 2020. **After thorough evaluation, the doctor prescribed medications I had never used before**—tiotropium inhaler, montelukast, rosuvastatin, and most importantly, the budesonide/formoterol inhaler. Tiotropium proved costly, but the budesonide/formoterol inhaler became my turning point.

Seeing the pulmonologist in 2020 changed everything. After decades of worsening COPD and repeated hospitalizations, **the budesonide/formoterol inhaler became the treatment that finally stabilized my breathing, reduced emergencies, and restored hope.**

I remain grateful to God and my family for this lifesaving turn.

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