

# health matters

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## The people behind the Cardiopulmonary Dept. at ECRMC...

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health matters  
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## OCTOBER IS "Healthy Lung Month"

### ASTHMA AND LUNG DISEASE

Speak of lung disease in Imperial County and most likely you are talking about asthma, for this area is afflicted with up to three times the normal asthma rate, particularly among school age children.

That is why El Centro Regional Medical Center is in the vanguard of agencies fighting the asthma war with the Imperial Valley Child Asthma program and other

associated programs. The asthma war moves to the center stage spotlight during the October observance of National Healthy Lung Month.

Dr. George Hancock, an El Centro pulmonologist, attributes this area's high asthma rate to the inordinately high ratio of organic matter, dust and pollens, in this desert air environment. Agriculture and other border industries contribute to the problem.

Most child asthmatics are treated by family physicians and Dr. Hancock, as a specialist, sees the more severe cases on referral. Like the asthma programs operating under the hospital umbrella, a good share of Dr. Hancock's work with patients involves educating them on the "pathology of the disease. They will know more about what to do in the event of an asthma episode if they understand what is happening to them.

"It is important for asthmatics to realize that this is a chronic disease," he adds, "involving chronic and dangerous inflammations. It is vital to control inflammation to avoid long term damage."

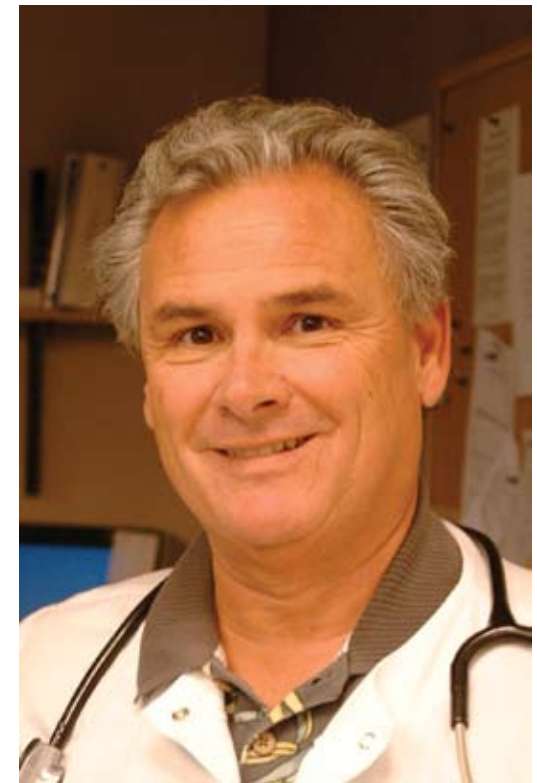
Aide Fulton, R.N., who coordinates the El Centro Regional Medical Center's asthma programs, has identified more than 7,200 Imperial County youth, five to 18 years of age, as asthmatics.

But the Imperial Valley Child Asthma Program, funded through a grant from the Imperial County Children and Families First Commission, concentrates on improving the quality of life and school readiness for asthmatic children up to the age of five.

The program includes home visits by a community health worker, instruction in the use of asthma treatment devices such as a nebulizer, regular education sessions in day-care centers throughout the valley and monthly support meetings for parents of asthmatic children.

Another program, California Action to Fight Asthma (CAFA), also funded by grants, seeks to identify and combat the environmental sources that trigger asthma.

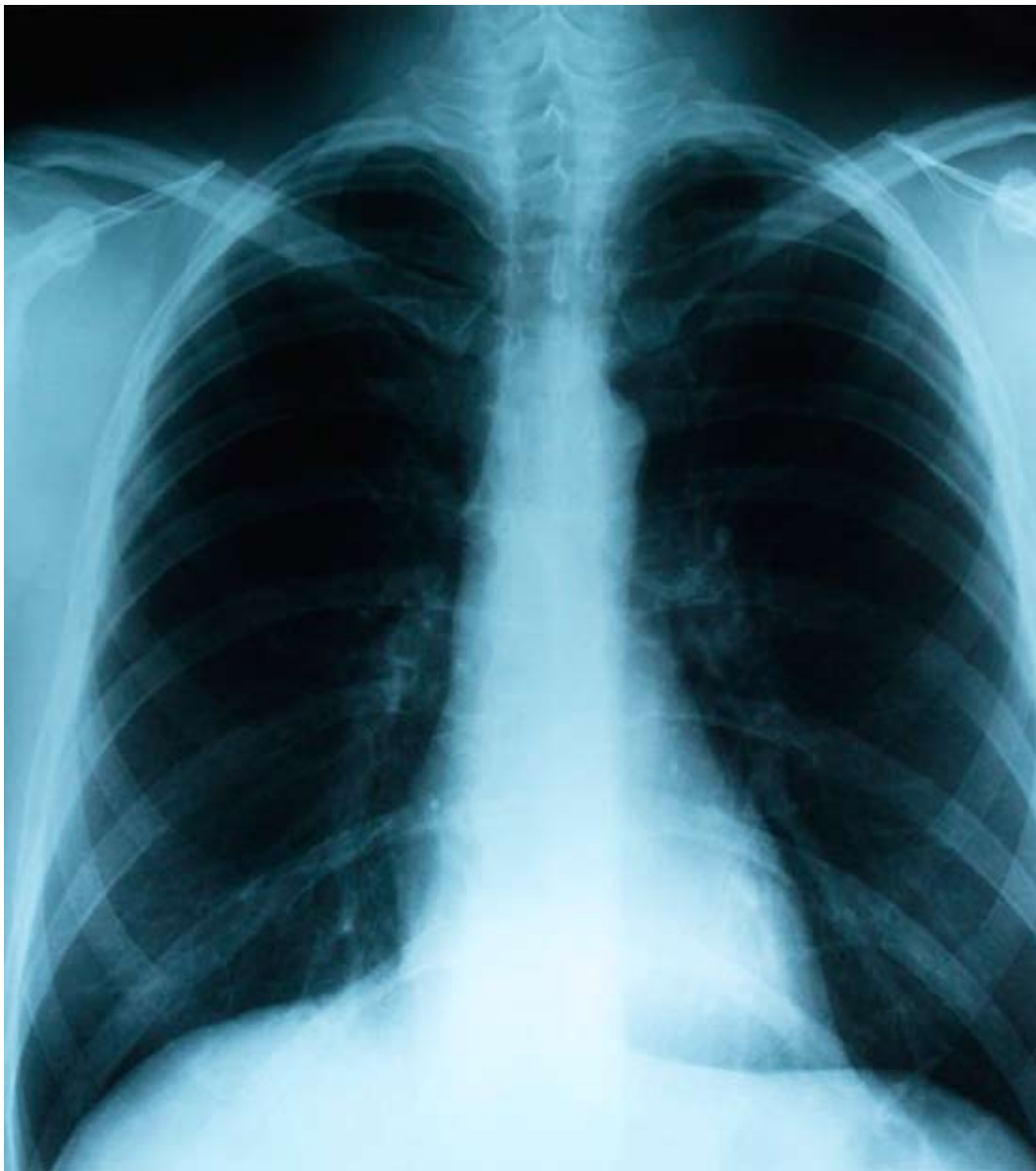
Still, Asthma is but one of the numerous ailments that can infect the lung, that in turn can cause an insufficient flow of oxygen into the blood stream and



George R. Hancock, M.D., Pulmonary Specialist. For additional information call 352-6766.

ultimately perhaps cause heart failure, hence the association of both cardiac and pulmonary functions into a single hospital Cardiopulmonary Department.

There is, for instance, tuberculosis that continues to be prevalent chronic disease, especially in California that lists by latest count more than 2.3 million sufferers. There is acute respiratory distress syndrome, (ARDS) a lung malfunction often caused by injury that allows blood to leak into the lung. There are others, chronic lung diseases like bronchitis and emphysema, the bane of smokers and the reason for the prolonged national campaign to get smokers to empty their ashtrays and keep them empty.



## Mammography Testing Has Its Rewards...



The pervading fear of cancer brings many Imperial Valley women to the Medical Imaging Department of El Centro Regional Medical Center each month to avail themselves of the mammogram services the department offers.

October has been designated as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and widespread attention to this observance normally brings a surge of women to the hospital for mammography testing.

Patients coming in for mammography during October will be receiving an observance recognition gift. The medical imaging department also plans an educational display for at least one public function.

So steady has been the demand for mammography that the hospital invested \$200,000 a couple of years ago to obtain two new state of the art mammography machines from Instrumentarium Images of Milwaukee, Wis.

Peggy Lyons, Director of Medical Imaging states that various changes in the mammogram may elicit a follow-up exam and/or possibly a surgical procedure.

One of the surgical options is stereotactic core needle breast biopsy which is a benign procedure allowing a computer to guide a needle into the abnormal area of the breast where tissue samples can be obtained. This service, which is available at ECRMC on

an out patient basis, does not result in any significant cosmetic sequelae or limitation of activities.

Lyons has four licensed mammography technologists on staff. The department also has five physician radiologists on staff. Dr. Caesar G. Trillanes is medical director of the department.

Lyons strongly advises regular mammography checkups, particularly for women over 40 especially those with family history of breast cancer. In addition, it is also important for women to do a self-exam of their breasts on a regular basis.

In addition to regular checkups, she advises women to "eat healthy, exercise and just take care of yourselves."

For additional information or to schedule your yearly mammogram call: (760) 339-7241.

Center of Healthcare Excellence

# ECRMC CARDIOPULMONARY DEPARTMENT:

## Who they are and what they do.

A significant share of the work in the Cardiopulmonary Department of El Centro Regional Medical Center is borne by a cadre of respiratory care practitioners who, under the direction of a physician, treat and care for patients with heart or lung problems.

Respiratory care practitioners comprise the bulk of the 26-member staff working under Randy L. Steffen, department director, and Dr. George R. Hancock, medical director. The rest include such specialists as electrocardiogram, pulmonary function and cardiac ultrasound technicians.

Respiratory techs, as they are commonly called, see patients ranging from premature infants with underdeveloped lungs to elderly patients whose lungs are diseased. They provide temporary relief and education to patients with chronic asthma or emphysema as well as emergency care to patients who are victims of asphyxiation, heart failure, stroke, drowning or shock.

Their treatment includes the use of oxygen, at flow levels prescribed by a physician, chest physiotherapy and aerosol medications. These practitioners also are qualified to intubate patients, inserting a tube connected to a ventilator into the trachea, or windpipe, to assist in breathing.

Steffen said the department, effective Oct. 18, has been authorized to begin performing its own arterial blood gases testing rather than sending the specimens to the laboratory. The drawn blood is tested for acidity, carbon dioxide levels, bicarbonate levels and hemoglobin. The tests can determine causes of chronic vs. acute breathing difficulties and other disorders.

A staff respiratory practitioner, Nadra Camden, has earned certification in Methacholine Challenge Testing, opening the way for using this pharmaceutical and computerized method of testing patients suspected of being asthmatic, a method never before used in the Imperial Valley.

Steffen's department also is assisting in putting together a rapid response team designed to head off code blue (critical patient emergency) situations through earlier detection of breathing and cardiac difficulties that can lead to cardiac or respiratory arrest. The team will consist of a registered nurse, a respiratory care practitioner, and a physician. Dr. Leslie



Mukau, an emergency room physician, will serve as the medical director for the team.

The latest survey by the American Heart Association for Respiratory Care finds 111,700 RCPs currently practicing in the United States of which about 13,000 are licensed to practice in California. About 75 percent work in hospital settings such as the Cardiopulmonary Department at ECRMC and in critical care environments such as emergency rooms.

They also, like nurses and other medical specialties, are in short supply nationally. Recent surveys show vacancy rates of six percent in California and up to 10 to 15 percent nationally. The need also is expected to increase with the anticipated growth of the elderly population in the nation.

The National Board for Respiratory Care, the accrediting agency, mandates that applicants for certification have a minimum of an associate degree from a recognized respiratory therapy education program and then pass an NBRC examination as evidence of competency at the entry level. Further education and testing is required to achieve Registered Respiratory Therapist status.

Most states, like California, also require licensing as a designation of legal status permitting them to practice in the state.

## ECRMC NEWS:

### A VALUED EMPLOYEE

After 10 years under the torrid sun in the farm fields of Imperial Valley, Blythe and Santa Maria, Graciela Palacios decided there must be more in life than picking lettuce.

She now is not only a working registered nurse but also holds a master's degree in nursing, all this while also raising three children and now a fourth, Gabriel, who is just four months old and with whom she was pregnant during much of the time she was working on her master's degree from the University of Phoenix.

Graciela works in the intensive care unit in the hospital and "has a passion for patient care." But because "I have learned so much," she would like to share some of that knowledge, particularly in the area of educating diabetics about self managing the disease.

She has worked for the hospital since 1996. Palacios earned her Bachelor of Nursing degree in 2001 at the Kearney Mesa campus of the University of Phoenix and recently added the master's degree.

**Congratulations** to a great employee!!

### Jr. AUXILIARY DONATES EQUIPMENT

Members of the Junior Auxiliary at El Centro Regional Medical Center have as their latest goal the purchase of a new heat lamp for newborns in the hospital nursery, and a single summer fund raising event has provided them with the bulk of the \$1,800 they need.

More than 20 members of the Junior Auxiliary worked an entire day on the hospital campus cooking, selling and delivering beef tortas, and at the end of the day they showed a net profit of \$1,344. The Mexican sandwiches were sold and delivered both to the staff in the hospital and to the public.

During the last school year, the group underwrote the purchase of new stethoscopes for the Pediatrics and Obstetrics Departments and 11 new pill crushers for Pediatrics and Medical Surgical Departments. The student group also purchased a new computer for the office in the hospital's Imperial Valley Child Care Center at a cost of \$1,100.

Auxiliary members are assigned tasks in various hospital departments like Central Supply, Medical Surgical, Obstetrics, Laboratory and the hospital's two Family Care Centers. They also helped with hospital Health Fairs and handle children's games at annual all-hospital employee picnic.

### PROTECTION FOR INFANTS

El Centro Regional Medical Center is increasing protection of young patients in its pediatrics unit against the possibility of abduction in the same manner in which infants in the nursery already are protected.

The security system installed is called the InstanTel Hugs Infant Protection System. It is a computer-driven program that involves electronic tags that keep a constant track on patients. The system also involves monitoring the facility with security cameras and installation of electronic security doors.

The hospital plans to enlarge its pediatrics unit from the present 12-beds to 22 beds, including two isolations rooms. The former South Wing in the older section of the hospital will be remodeled to accommodate the enlarged, state-of-the-art facility that already has been approved by the state Department of Health.

### ECRMC MALL WALKERS PROGRAM

- Track Your Progress
- Monitor Your Health
- Meet New People
- Earn Prizes/Awards

Registration is free at [ecrmcMallWalkers.org](http://ecrmcMallWalkers.org)

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