

Fragrance and chemical sensitivity among the medically vulnerable

Many medical vulnerable patients can be made seriously ill from exposure to low levels of fragranced products. Some can even face life threatening emergencies. Some of these patients are forced to forego even the most basic medical care due the vast quantities of fragrances and other chemicals in the medical environment.

Asthma - The American Lung Association notes: *“Scents from perfumes, deodorants and cleaning supplies can affect a person with asthma.”* The Canadian Medical Association Journal notes *“... a range of stimuli that do not fall into the category of allergens”* provoking asthma, which can include *“second-hand cigarette smoke, cleaning fluids such as bleach, perfume and other strong odors.”* (CMAJ, October 2015) ***Asthma attacks can be fatal.***

Vocal Cord Dysfunction - National Jewish Health says, *“Possible triggers of vocal cord dysfunction (VCD) and are often similar to asthma triggers.”* They note *“Strong odors or fragrance”* as triggering VCD. ***VCD can be a life threatening emergency when vocal chord spasms cut off the airway.***

Mast cell disorders - including Mastocytosis and mast cell activation syndrome. The Mastocytosis Society lists, among triggers, *“Natural odors, chemical odors, perfumes and scents.”* A myriad of symptoms can occur in multiple body systems, and **can include anaphylaxis - a life threatening emergency.**

Non-allergic rhinitis - Mayo Clinic says that among the triggers of this condition are *“Environmental or occupational irritants. ... secondhand smoke or strong odors, such as perfumes, can trigger nonallergic rhinitis. Chemical fumes, such as those you might be exposed to in certain occupations, also may be to blame.”*

Other conditions in which fragrance can exacerbate or cause medical symptoms include:

Neuroendocrine Cancer * Cancer patients undergoing treatment *Gulf War Syndrome
*Fibromyalgia * Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (Chronic Fatigue Syndrome)
Multiple Chemical Sensitivity/Environmental Illness *Toxic Encephalopathy
*Autism *Migraines * Parkinsons Disease * autoimmune diseases * COPD * Connective tissue disorders such as Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome * Hereditary Alpha Trypesemia Syndrome *
and more...

The medical imperative to “do no harm” should extend to the environment in which medicine is practiced. Fragrance is unnecessary in the medical setting and downright dangerous to many vulnerable patients. More medical facilities, such as those with the University of Michigan, are banning fragrances in the workplace and include “Fragrance Free Environment” notices in patient materials. This is a step in the right direction in protecting the health of vulnerable populations. ***“Hospital environments free from artificial scents should become a uniform policy, promoting the safety of patients, staff and visitors alike. ... individual hospitals must take the lead, particularly in spaces where susceptible patients wait.”*** ~ Ken Flegel, MD and James G. Martin, MD, Canadian Medical Association Journal, October 2015