

YOUR HOSPITAL

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**SPECIAL 65TH
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Asthma classes for parents: Reducing medication with education

It's every parent's nightmare. Their child has difficulty breathing and they must rush to the Hospital Emergency. Precious seconds and minutes are lost as they try to help their child get air.

David Crawford and his wife Charlena know what it's like. Their three children all have asthma. So there have been many nights that they have rushed to the Toronto East General (TEGH) Emergency for help. They have watched in fear as their children cough, wheeze and start to turn blue.

"Second only to the common cold, asthma is the most prominent childhood illness. One of the most frequent causes of hospital admission in the paediatric unit, asthma affects more than 150,000 Canadian children," says Toronto East General Pharmacist Sean Wharton.

To help parents, family members, daycare workers and teachers of children with asthma, Toronto East General started a class last September to increase awareness and treatment of childhood asthma. "More children are developing asthma and it's getting more severe," explains Sean.

"We've found that many parents are not properly informed about childhood asthma," says Sean. "By working with the parents, we hope to prevent mild cases of asthma from turning severe. Our goal is to decrease the use of medication through education. "So far the classes have been successful and are supported by staff paediatricians. We provide information about how to care for asthmatic children, including recognizing attacks, side effects of med-



Pharmacist Sean Wharton demonstrates Kyle's medication on a teddy bear.

ications and how to correctly use the inhaler and other devices. We also answer common questions and stress that children can and do lead active, normal lives with asthma."

David and Charlena learned about the class when they brought their two-year-old son, Kyle, to TEGH in April with what they thought was croup (a childhood respiratory disorder, commonly caused by a virus). "Our two older children have asthma. We should have recognized the signs," says Charlena. "So, we went to the class and learned simple ways to avoid attacks. Culprits like smoke, pets and dust are ones we can

control. The nutritional information, provided by TEGH dietician Gail Low, also made a lot of sense. Sometimes food allergies can trigger attacks. So we will have to be careful."

Today Kyle still suffers bouts of asthma. But his parents are prepared, and can help keep his case mild. "We know we can come to TEGH when we run into trouble. They've always taken good care of our children."

The classes are held once a month at TEGH and are free of charge. Dr. Petrou, Paediatrician, plans to further asthma education through an Asthma Clinic which will be underway soon. Call 469-6037 for details.