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COUNTING SHEEP GOES HIGH-TECH

Devices Improve Compliance for People with Sleep Disorders

- We spend about 1/3 of our life asleep.
- Some 40 million Americans suffer from chronic disorders of sleep. Many remain undiagnosed.
- Six out of every 10 adults say they have sleep problems a few nights a week or more.
- Annual direct cost of sleep-related problems in U.S. is \$16 billion. Additional \$50-\$100 billion in indirect costs (accidents, litigation, property destruction, hospitalization, and death).
- In U.S., over 100,000 motor vehicle accidents annually are sleep-related.
- Disasters such as Chernobyl, Three Mile Island, Challenger, Bhopal, and Exxon Valdez were officially attributed to errors in judgment induced by sleepiness or fatigue.

Source: University of Maryland-Sleep Disorders Center

NORWOOD, MASS. (Issued October 2009) -- Most likely one of your earliest memories involves a parent telling you about the importance of getting a good night's sleep.

Well, no matter how old you are now, it's still good advice. Lack of sleep can cause traffic accidents and workplace injuries, affect job performance and relationships, and lead to more serious conditions such as depression, heart disease, high blood pressure, irritability, memory loss, trouble concentrating and more. Snoring, often associated with sleep disorders, can affect the quality of other people's sleep, too. "Many people who don't know why they're always tired or moody may not be aware they have a sleep disorder and should be tested," says Registered Respiratory Therapist Judy Barry, Clinical Manager at Reliable Respiratory of Norwood. "And often we see people who have been diagnosed and are being treated -- but are still tired. They should check to see if they're compliant with the prescribed treatment plan." Once an individual undergoes a sleep study and is diagnosed with sleep apnea, their doctor may prescribe use of a CPAP unit (continuous positive

airway pressure) and mask that forces a gentle, steady flow of air at a constant pressure rate into otherwise closed passages during sleeps. Blocked air passages can disrupt the deep sleep a body needs for top physical and mental health.

Judy Barry notes that if the doctor, for any number of reasons, cannot pinpoint a precise pressure setting using a CPAP unit, he or she may prescribe a higher-tech APAP (automatic positive airway pressure) AutoSet unit that, using complex algorithms, automatically adjusts the pressure within a given range after every breath. "This breath-by-breath pressure adjustment reduces the number of sleep-time respiratory events." The APAP unit can also adjust air flow to snoring and mask leaks.

Another high-tech device used to ensure prescription compliance is a wireless, remote monitoring unit called ResTraxx. From Reliable Respiratory's Norwood office, Compliance Manager Heidi Gillis daily monitors all CPAP users, checking for those who fall outside desired thresholds, alerting respiratory therapists and doctors as needed for prompt intervention. Gillis says, "A key part of my job is educating customers on the importance of using their equipment. For insurance coverage, most referral sources require 30, 60 or 90 days of compliance for their patients because it might take up to three months for a patient to feel the full benefits in their lives, for them to get used to wearing the equipment, or for us to determine the best devices or masks."

Reliable Respiratory's full-time Compliance Coordinator helps improve the compliance rate, as she oversees a comprehensive multi-tiered Compliance Monitoring Program that includes in-home CPAP unit set-up and instruction, a follow-up clinical visit, regular CPAP unit card readings, and follow-up reminder calls. Results and compliance levels are shared with the patient's doctor as well as with their insurer. Gillis says a local company such as Reliable can maintain closer, more personal contact with patients than the big national firms – often achieving better compliance and a better quality of life for formerly sleep-deprived customers.

Why is sleep so important? Consider these figures: Each year the cost of sleep disorders, sleep deprivation and sleepiness, is estimated to be about \$16 million in direct costs, but \$50 to \$100 billion a year in indirect and related costs. And according to the NHTSA, falling asleep while driving is responsible for at least 100,000 crashes, 71,000 injuries and 1,550 deaths each year in the U.S. (See box for more data.)

Besides devices and supplies to address sleep-disordered breathing, Reliable Respiratory also provides nebulizers for those requiring medication dispensed as a liquid mist, and oxygen cylinders and concentrators for people with lung disease. The company also distributes through doctors' offices instant diagnostic kits for flu and strep.

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