Emotional breathlessness: 7 in 10 unaware of the hidden burden of chronic lung disease

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Millions of people living with chronic lung conditions such as COPD, asthma, and long COVID don't just struggle with physical breathlessness — they also face emotional breathlessness. Anxiety, fear, depression, and social isolation often go unseen and untreated, yet they have a profound impact on quality of life.

A recent nationwide survey of over 2,100 UK adults, commissioned by Dr. Devi Sundar founder of Tele-Therapies and MindBody Synergy CIC, based in Gloucestershire, UK, reveals a striking lack of public awareness. Only 31% of adults recognise the emotional toll of chronic respiratory disease, leaving nearly seven in ten unaware.

The survey reveals striking patterns: younger adults (18–24 years) and men (28%) are least aware, while older adults (55+, 36%) and women (34%) are slightly more informed. Working-age adults are the most under-informed: only 14% are "very aware," while one in four admits being "not aware at all."

Life experience matters too. Separated or divorced adults (38%) and widowed individuals (33%) show higher awareness, likely reflecting personal illness or caregiving experiences. Married adults (29%) and parents (33%) are moderately aware, highlighting the need for targeted education in workplaces, families, and communities.

Regional differences add another layer: awareness is highest in Wales (37%), the South West (35%), and Northern Ireland (33%), and lowest in the South East (27%) and East of England (29%). These disparities show that public health messaging and local support services are unevenly reaching those who need them most.

Emotional breathlessness isn't just invisible — it can worsen physical symptoms, reduce treatment adherence, and delay help-seeking. Physical breathlessness can be treated, but anxiety, despair, and social isolation often go unnoticed. That's why integrating mental health support into respiratory care is essential.

"Our findings show a significant gap in public perception, which can delay help-seeking and under-recognition of psychological distress in people with chronic respiratory illness," said Dr. Sundar, founder of Tele-Therapies and MindBody Synergy CIC.

At Tele-Therapies and MindBody Synergy CIC, we combine psychotherapy, neuroscience, Ayurveda, and breath-based rehabilitation into trauma-informed, culturally sensitive programs. Patients who receive this integrated care cope better, recover faster, and feel less isolated. Treating mind and lungs together is not a luxury — it's a necessity.

We need immediate action:

1. Public awareness campaigns highlighting the emotional burden of chronic lung disease.

2. Psychological screening embedded into pulmonary rehabilitation programs.

3. Clinician training in trauma-informed, culturally sensitive care.

4. Targeted funding for integrated mind–lung care models.

The mind and lungs are deeply connected through breath and the nervous system. Ignoring emotional suffering is no longer acceptable. Greater awareness, integrated care, and targeted funding could change the lives of millions across the UK.

Every breath matters — it's time our health system treats patients holistically, not just physically.

Support Our public awareness campaign" Integrate Mental and Physical Health Care for COPD Patients in Gloucestershire" https://www.change.org/MentalHealthCOPD

Dr. Devi Sundar, Ph.D

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Founder, Tele-Therapies LTD & MindBody Synergy CIC

About Dr. Devi Sundar
Dr. Devi Sundar founded Tele-Therapies LTD and MindBody Synergy CIC

MindBody Synergy CIC, empowers individuals and communities through holistic mind-body interventions, supporting people to overcome chronic respiratory conditions, mental health challenges, and workplace stress-related injuries nationwide. Offers subsidized training to patients and healthcare professionals. Popular activities- Breathe café (free) and Canvas Breath Art (subsidised fee)

Dr. Sundar's book, Breath Beyond Illness, explores the emotional toll of chronic respiratory disease and the breath–trauma loop linking mind and lungs. It offers evidence-based insights, reflection prompts, and her Psychosocially Integrative Pulmonary Rehab (PIPR) Model for integrating emotional and physical healing.

Breath Beyond Illness is available on Amazon:
Breath Beyond Illness encourages readers to rediscover the healing power of every breath.
• eBook: https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0FV8YG8YM/ref
• Paperback: https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0FVDYCF64/ref

About the Study
The findings are drawn from Tele-Therapies' service development survey. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size: 2,173 UK adults (aged 18+). Fieldwork was conducted online between 7th–8th October 2025. Data were weighted to be nationally representative.

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