



ESM Practitioner Profile

Dorisse Neale, RN, Asthma and the Buteyko Method

Highlighting Members of the Network of ESM Professionals

BY DENISE ESTEVES, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
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Dorisse Neale, R.N., B.S.N. is a wellness consultant and teacher of the Eucapnic-Buteyko Breathing Method in Sebastapol, California.

She is a recovering lifetime asthmatic who uses the Buteyko Method to teach asthmatics about reversing the devastating symptoms of asthma and reestablishing the internal balance within the body.

She can be reached at 707-812-5426, and through www.breathdance.org.

Tell me about your history with asthma.

I was asthmatic from as early as I could remember, from age three on. I remember a lot of doctor visits from my early childhood and despite all those visits my asthma just seemed to get worse. By age five, my asthma was severe enough that I was put on a lot of medications, and continued to take them for 30 years. I had hundreds of emergency hospitalizations and for sixteen years I suffered through weekly allergy injections. Part of this regimen was yearly trips to the asthma and allergy specialist where I would get tested with a series of 30 to 40 injections to determine what allergens were affecting me. The first time I went through that process is was horribly traumatic, and was, I feel, the first step in disassociating myself from my body. So my first experiences with asthma treatments were not positive ones.

What did you experience using traditional medicines?

I had 30 years of steroid therapy. The side effects are widely known. At the time I was interested in all the new drug treatments. But then I began my nursing career in the late 70s, which was the early exploration of holistic health and through that my understanding of the foundations of healing were

drastically altered. After much exploration and discovery I eventually left the health care system. Now I'm an educator. At one time I was a nurse who educated, and now I am an educator who happens to be a nurse.

How did you come to learn about the Buteyko Method?

In 1998 a girlfriend sent me an article from Mothering Magazine that explained the Buteyko Method. I remember thinking, "Why do I not know this? I've been a nurse for years, and an asthma sufferer for even more, and I've never come across this treatment." Then, the next morning, at my daughters' school, a young girl came into the office clutching her throat with a look of panic in her eyes, having an attack. I took her by the hand and I sat down with her and taught her what I had read the night before. Twenty minutes later, she was fine—her breathing was calm. In that moment, I felt I had found my calling.

Have you seen an increase in awareness about the method in recent years?

The first year I learned about the existence of Buteyko, I was gung-ho about spreading the word. I contacted the American Lung Association to see how we could do outreach

about it. Of course, they didn't want to hear it. It has taken a long time, and like many new ideas it is being brought forth from the grassroots. When I first started in '99, I remember doing a web search and there were three sites, and they didn't have very good information. But now if you do a search you can find hundreds of references. And there have been clinical trials, in particular at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane, Australia, so there is more awareness in the medical community as well.

What do you find are the challenges in educating the US public about the Buteyko Method?

I see two main challenges: the first is that we are a society of people disconnected from our bodies and our own health. We abdicate responsibility—whenever people feel something wrong, or sense something wrong in their children, the reaction is, “Let's go to the doctor. Let's have the doctor look at us and fix us.” The health care system is set up to take care of our bodies like mechanics take care of cars. And that leaves too small a role for personal responsibility, for awareness, for prevention. There is so much that we can do for ourselves, to heal our own bodies. And yet people can't let go of the idea that if it is related to health then it needs to be supplied and performed by the doctor.

And the second reason is that the inhaler and treatment industry is a multi-million dollar one, and it preys on asthmatics' fear. Asthma is a fear-based disease. We can live without many things, but we can't go without air for long and that can be terrifying to an asthmatic. So the inhaler industry preys on that.

Traditionally the medical profession has had total control over asthma management.

That is exactly why this treatment was created in Russia in an environment where

people with asthma do not have access to basic asthma medications or medical care. Buteyko helps patients manage their own illness.

What is the typical regimen for new patient?

The first thing I stress to patients is paying attention, being aware, and reconnecting to their body. After the first session, patients walk away with breath awareness. That is paramount. The ideal program is five one-and-a-half hour classes over a two-week period, which is a rather standard method for most practitioners. I might see a patient Monday-Tuesday-Thursday the first week and Monday-Thursday the following. I may also recommend three half-hour sessions a day if someone is really suffering. The results are directly proportional to the time spent practicing the method. It all comes back to breathing. We can talk and talk and talk about it, but for this treatment to work you have to do it physically.

Do you recommend any complementary activities, herbs, botanicals, or supplements to patients?

Breathing is first—you can do a million other things, but if you don't focus on breathing it won't get better. The breath is unconscious, and you have to make it conscious. I want my clients to realize their responsibility. It isn't about taking something outside of yourself. Even the supplement industry is huge and commoditized: “Take this herb, use this supplement and you'll feel better.” It reinforces the disconnect between ourselves and our bodies.

That said, second to the breathing is hydration, nutrition, rest and exercise. Water is essential. I find asthmatics are highly dehydrated. Nutrition is always important. And asthma can be an allergic reaction, so of course certain foods should be eliminated. I'm an herbalist, too—there is a whole class of respiratory allies—nettle, mullein, teas.



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Rest is critical, as is exercise and learning how to use breathing in exercise. This is all part of a total lifestyle.

Who is most responsive to this treatment?

The children I work with are the most responsive to this treatment because they don't have preconditioning. The children who respond best are the sickest. A lot of these kids are so embarrassed about their inhalers—it makes them think, "I'm not as good as other kids, I'm dependent on this medicine, I can't do PE." When I teach kids like that, they are thrilled—they have an easy technique they can do at their desk and

no one knows they're doing it. And as for elderly patients, many are suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and although Buteyko won't cure it, the quality of life is improved. Just being able to walk outside and enjoy their lives. A patient of mine, 72 years old, got completely off his oxygen tank. Can you imagine how he felt?

Ultimately the highest realization for my patients is that we have it all within us. I want people to find ways to really connect with themselves and within themselves, bypassing the intellectual and the emotional, focusing on the physiological and physical processes. I'm a nurse—the body fascinates me. And the power we have within our bodies is huge.

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