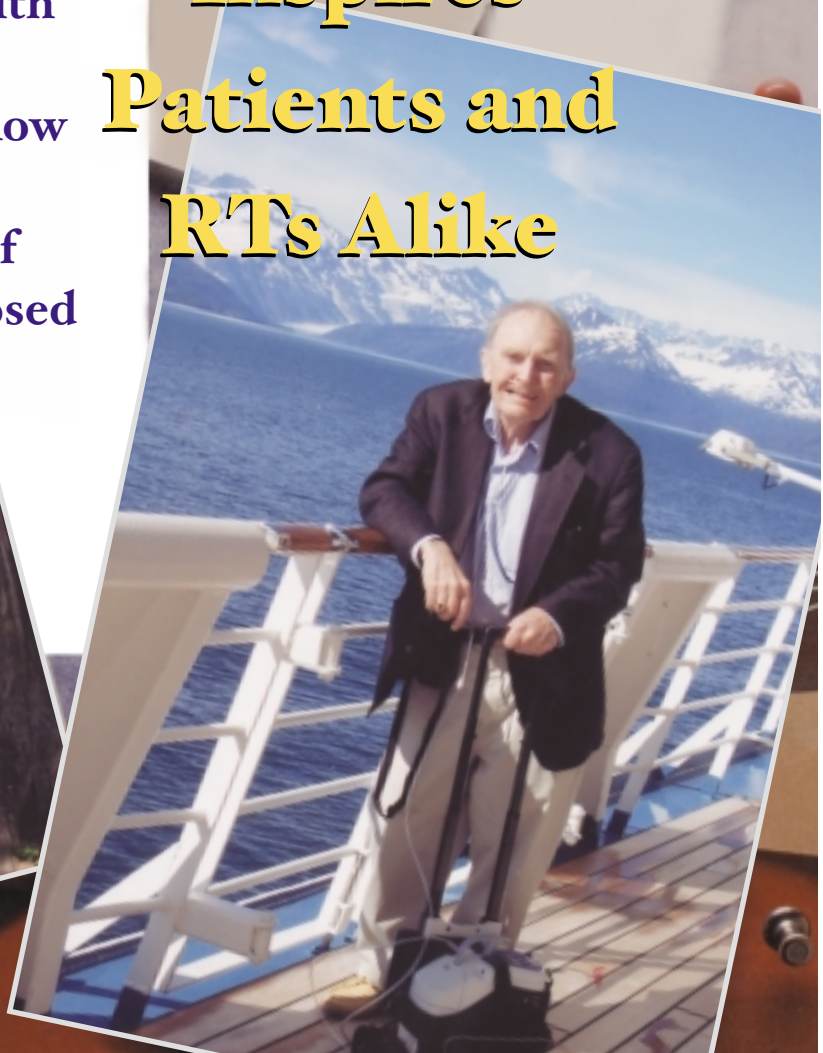


COPD Stories

Living with Lung Disease Inspires Patients and RTs Alike

Most of us take breathing for granted. But for people with COPD, breathing is a conscious act. They have to think about each inspiration and expiration. They live with the threat of acute exacerbations. They face an uncertain future; and they do it with courage, with tenacity, and with humor.

The following stories show how these patients, and the AARC members who help take care of them, rise to the challenges posed by this disease every day.



Traveling Tankless by Robert C. Keith

New Technology Puts COPD Patients Back on the Road

As an around-the-clock oxygen user for the last four years, it was a joy to me this summer, at age 74, to take a trouble-free, three-week vacation from Baltimore to Alaska and back without making any use of the familiar green-topped aluminum compressed gas cylinders.

There was one exception in this otherwise tank-free journey: a three-and-a-half hour flight from Anchorage to Seattle, on which the airline supplied the compressed oxygen in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules. Apart from that flight, my oxygen support came solely from a light-weight, portable electric concentrator that has been on the market since last fall.

The model I used, the Inogen One™, was made available to me by the manufacturer, at my urging, as a way of testing its efficacy on such a multi-faceted vacation agenda as mine. My test run will likely help inform many other such trips, thanks to the July 12 ruling from the FAA, long sought by oxygen users, which specifically names the Inogen One and another device, the AirSep Life-Style™, as concentrators the airlines may allow passengers to use for onboard oxygen. The two devices won the FAA's approval — after hard lobbying by the National Home Oxygen Patients Association and other interest groups, including the AARC — because they fit under the aircraft seats, create the oxygen on the spot in small doses, and do not raise the issue of compressed gas.

The tankless portion of my trip included seven segments of Amtrak service; a motor coach trip from Seattle to Vancouver; seven days aboard Carnival Line's "Spirit" from Vancouver to Anchorage, with lengthy (six- to eight-hour) explorations ashore in Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, and Sitka;

a two-day layover in Anchorage; and visits with friends in Portland, OR, and Sandpoint, ID. On a drive out of Sandpoint into northern Montana, I sauntered with my machine, albeit slowly, through a mile-long shady path to see the 500-year-old cedar trees of Ross National Forest. All of that without a single gas canister (other than a backup I lost to Homeland Security at the Anchorage airport and replaced in Seattle, but never had to use).

On my trip, I was relieved not to have to arrange with my supplier affiliates to have equipment awaiting me at every destination. Early in the trip, when an Amtrak train was delayed about 12 hours by a freight derailment, it was easy to change my plans and visit Portland after the Alaskan cruise instead of before it without any need to notify suppliers. I was free to go where I wanted without their logistical support.

My portable concentrator can be recharged by plugging the device into a cigarette lighter, and I found this to be most useful — in more ways than one. The driver of the motorcoach to Vancouver, for example, allowed me to use her port, giving me and my companion the choice seats behind her. One plug-in site in Juneau, in a restaurant at the top of the mountainside tram, gave me the most sweeping view the city offers. On the cruise ship, the dining room plug-in was on a side wall, compelling the maitre d' to give me a prime window seat in order to access it. I got to count the sea otters and spouting whales. I also plugged in on long taxi trips; and most visitors' centers, restaurants, and public attractions had plug-in places as well. The ability to recharge batteries while receiving oxygen, without returning to a home base, keeps you almost in a state of perpetual motion.

Amtrak reserves a lower level com-

partment on its double-decker trains for persons with disabilities, with a wall socket always in the same place — back seat, right-hand side. Bathrooms are nearby on the same level, and the car attendant will bring meals to you if you don't want to go through the hassle of climbing stairs and making your way through several swaying coaches to reach the dining car.

In fact, of all the public transportation modes I used during the trip, none was more supportive of passengers with disabilities than Amtrak. I was traveling alone on the Amtrak segments, with far more gear than I could easily handle myself. I boarded at unmanned stations in Martinsburg, WV, and Sandpoint, ID, with an assist from friends or fellow passengers. For the change of trains in Chicago, the traditional Red Caps were on hand with their fast and terrifying electric buggies to take me into the station and to and from the doors of my compartments.

But it was my new portable oxygen concentrator that made the real difference during this vacation. By eliminating the need to be forever replacing or replenishing canisters, these new concentrators free the user to lead a more active life, seek out friendlier climates and cleaner air winter and summer, and just possibly gain a little more time on earth. For me they offer an opportunity to return to the complicated type of travel itinerary I enjoyed before a Johns Hopkins pulmonary physician issued his diagnosis of severe emphysema four years ago. 🍷

Robert C. Keith is former editor and director of the *Los Angeles Times/Washington Post News Service* and an elected board member of the National Home Oxygen Patients Association. His book, "Baltimore Harbor—A Pictorial History" (3rd ed.), was published by Johns Hopkins University Press last spring. He lives in Baltimore, MD.