

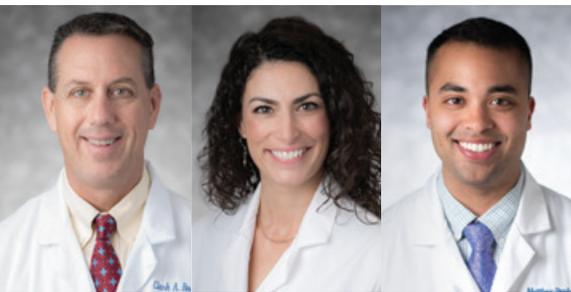
## Taking a Meticulous Approach to Patients Suffering from Chronic Cough

Coughing is a reflexive response that seldom merits much concern by itself. Nevertheless, Americans spend about \$4 billion a year on cough suppressants, and a chronic cough is one of the top complaints among patients seeking primary care evaluation.

By definition, chronic cough is a persistent cough lasting more than eight weeks. The condition can be quite debilitating, and determining the cause of a patient's chronic cough is key to effectively treating it.

That's why, in 2018, UCSF established the Chronic Cough Clinic at the UCSF Voice and Swallowing Center within the Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery.

"The Chronic Cough Clinic is a unique resource. It is a place where patients suffering from chronic cough can receive meticulous review of past care, multidisciplinary evaluation, and treatment by a team of experts who specialize in caring for the patient with chronic cough," says its director, Clark Rosen, MD, Professor of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery and Chief of the Division of Laryngology.



From left: Clark Rosen, MD; Sarah Schneider, MS, CCC-SLP; Matthew Stephen, MMS PA-C

### Working Across Disciplines

Because common reasons for chronic cough may be conditions such as acid reflux, respiratory disorders, or nerve injury, the Chronic Cough Clinic was designed as a multi-disciplinary center of excellence for patients requiring or desiring expert tertiary or quaternary examination and treatment for their cough condition.

The clinic involves in-house laryngology and speech language pathology and close collaboration with

pulmonary, allergy, gastroenterology, and neurology consultants to optimize the evaluation and care of patients with chronic cough.

A unique aspect of the Chronic Cough Clinic is the strong collaboration with speech language pathologists (SLPs), professionals who work to prevent and treat speech, language, and swallowing disorders.

"The SLPs in our clinic are specialized in voice, swallowing, and upper airway disorders such as chronic cough and have specific training in these areas to maximize treatment outcomes for our patients", says Sarah Schneider, MS, CCC-SLP, a speech pathologist and co-director of the UCSF Voice and Swallowing Center.

### Addressing the Individual Patient

Many patients with chronic cough have had poor success seeking care, says Physician Assistant Matthew Stephen, MMS PA-C, a team member in the clinic.

"One goal is to coordinate multiple perspectives in the evaluation and treatment of our patients, many of whom have struggled with the condition for a very long time. Once we have ruled out typical chronic cough factors, other causes are evaluated, such as laryngeal sensitivity or a very irritated larynx, where a lot of research is now focused. For example, a patient may have had an initial injury a decade ago, such as a really bad cold and cough. Maybe the cold resolved, but the imprint of that initial injury has persisted. If the throat becomes irritated, that initial injury makes the patient more susceptible to behavioral patterns of coughing," Stephen says.

An SLP who sees a patient for cough management therapy develops a patient specific treatment plan to address the individual's complaints and manifestations of cough. The speech therapy is focused on the throat and includes cough management breathing techniques, relaxation, massage in the front of the neck, and sometimes even voice exercises if a person's cough is triggered by talking. Therapy techniques are supported by research and can be very beneficial in addressing symptoms.



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– Clark Rosen, MD

### A Coordinated Care Plan

"The patient may suffer for years and often go from primary care to urgent care and in some cases to the Emergency Room. They may also be sent to multiple specialists such as allergists, gastroenterologists, and pulmonologists. The result is that people with chronic cough don't receive a comprehensive coordinated care plan and may feel that they are bounced back and forth between different providers' care," Stephen says.

"In the Chronic Cough Clinic we perform comprehensive chart reviews with input from multiple disciplines to determine if the workup to this point has been sufficient or if there are areas for further investigation. We access the most current research to help guide our treatment plan. We want patients and providers to know that we are here to perform a deep dive into the patient's presentation, symptoms, and treatment," he adds.

Recent research at the Chronic Cough Clinic is targeted at laryngeal hyper-sensitivity and chronic cough. A superior laryngeal nerve block clinical trial, which is now open to qualifying patients, will address treatment. The clinical trial is a prospective clinical pathway for patients with chronic cough who may benefit from a superior laryngeal nerve block. This is a new treatment modality that has not been prospectively evaluated in a systematic manner.

"All too often, chronic cough patients are told by specialists what is not the cause of their cough," says Dr. Rosen. "They are not given assistance with how to find the proper cause and treatment for their cough. The Chronic Cough Clinic is here for these individuals." ■