

Stages of care provided by Washington University Physicians

Margaret, age 53, visits her doctor and complains of lethargy, discomfort and shortness of breath.

1 Primary Care

First contact with the patient

Margaret's primary care doctor is concerned about the severity of her symptoms and refers her to a Washington University Physician at Barnes-Jewish Hospital for an in-depth assessment.

2 Secondary Care

Medical specialists

A cardiologist rules out heart problems but suspects pulmonary disease. Margaret is referred to a tertiary provider — this time, a pulmonary specialist — for a conclusive assessment.

3 Tertiary Care

Specialized consults, diagnostics, treatments

This pulmonologist confirms that Margaret is experiencing a significant decrease in pulmonary function. Diagnosis: advanced Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease — emphysema.

4 Quaternary Care

Advanced medicine, highly specialized, research-oriented

Next, a thoracic surgeon considers whether a lung volume reduction surgery would relieve Margaret's symptoms. Instead, given her condition, it is recommended that she consider participating in a clinical research trial for a new treatment modality.