INTRODUCTION TO THE COPD DISEASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Trustees of your Health & Welfare Plan entered into an agreement with RJLee & Associates, LLP, to provide plan participants Disease Management and Wellness Programs. These programs assist the Welfare Plan in accomplishing its goal of finding innovative new ways to help you and your family stay healthy. The first two Disease Management Programs targeted Diabetes and Asthma.

The third program targets Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis - diseases that decrease the lung's ability to take in oxygen and remove carbon dioxide. COPD claims the lives of 117,500 Americans every year.

Chronic bronchitis is an inflammation of the lining of the bronchial tubes. Airways become inflamed and clogged with mucus obstructing breathing. An estimated 11 million people have been diagnosed with chronic bronchitis. Symptoms of chronic bronchitis include chronic cough, increased mucus, frequent clearing of the throat, and shortness of breath.

Emphysema occurs when the air sacs in the lungs break down and slow the flow of oxygen. Emphysema causes irreversible lung damage. As emphysema progresses, the effort needed to breathe increases. An estimated 3 million Americans have been diagnosed with emphysema. Symptoms of emphysema include cough, shortness of breath, and a limited exercise tolerance.

Emphysema and chronic bronchitis usually occur together. Long-term smoking is the most common cause of COPD, responsible for 80-90 percent of all cases. A smoker is 10 times more likely than a non-smoker to die of COPD. Other risk factors are heredity, second-hand smoke, air pollution, and a history of frequent childhood respiratory infections. Taking certain precautions and maintaining good health habits can prevent many lung diseases. It's important to know the signs of lung disease because early treatment can prevent serious damage to lung tissue. Early symptoms may include:

- Breathing problems
- Persistent coughing
- Unusual mucus production
- Persistent or recurring fever or fatigue
- Chest pains
- Blood in the mucus

COPD is progressive and irreversible. Although there is no cure for COPD, there are treatment plans that involve stopping smoking that can provide symptom relief and help slow the progression of the disease. A recent survey by the American Lung Association showed that half of all COPD patients (51%) said their condition limits their ability to work. It also limits normal physical exertion (70%), household chores (56%), social activities (53%), sleeping (50%), and family activities (46%). But with proper treatment, it is possible to lead a full and active life.

As in all matters of health, the best approach to keep your COPD under control is to learn as much as you can about this disease. Perhaps the first place to start would be
the Could It Be COPD Quiz. This will help you check what you know about COPD. If you would like to receive more information, please contact kathleenmiller@rileellp.com.