WRS For GP

Clinical Intelligence Brief | Issue 01 | March 26

WHEN THE NUMBERS LOOK NORMAL BUT THE PATIENT ISN'T

Some patients remain clearly symptomatic despite reassuring investigations. This issue highlights two common scenarios where **physiology is missed by standard tests.**

When the story feels louder than the test results, *think twice.*

Sleep

Mild Sleep Apnoea. Still Very Sleepy.

Clinical Problem

The Apnoea Hypopnea Index (AHI) measure discrete events but may miss flow limitation.

Sleep may be significantly disrupted despite a "mild" AHI classification.

Case Snapshot

42 years old female

AHI 7
Epworth Sleepiness Score 10

Symptoms:
Unrefreshing sleep
Fatigue
Poor concentration

Key findings:
Recurrent flow limitation → unstable sleep physiology

What You May Miss

Mild AHI does not always mean mild sleep disruption.

When should I refer?

- Excessive sleepiness despite mild sleep apnoea

- Unexplained fatigue with suspected sleep disorder

Watch Out

Sleepiness despite "treated" OSA

If persistent sleepiness despite:
Adequate therapy
Good compliance
Low AHI

Consider:
Narcolepsy
Idiopathic hypersomnolence

FOR GP Evidence insight Precision
Western Respiratory & Sleep

Respiratory

Breathless with normal spirometry ?

Clinical Problem

Spirometry assesses large and medium airway but may miss small airway disease.

Patients may present with:

- Breathlessness with normal spirometry
- Recurrent "bronchitis"
- Persistent cough
- Chest tightness without wheeze

If spirometry is technically adequate and repeatedly normal, further repetition is often low yield.

The issue may be which part of the airway is being assessed.

Forced Oscillation Testing detects small airway dysfunction before spirometry becomes abnormal.

Case Snapshot

62-year-old female, non-smoker

Recurrent "bronchitis" over 2 years
Multiple antibiotic courses
Investigations:

- Spirometry: normal
- Chest X-ray: normal

Key Finding:
Small airway dysfunction detected on Forced Oscillation Testing

What You May Miss
Normal Spirometry ≠ Normal Airways

When should I refer?

- Breathlessness with normal spirometry
- Recurrent "bronchitis" with normal imaging

Upcoming Education Event

Danger Close: Respiratory disease hiding in plain sight
Akoya Suite,Breakwater Hilarys Marina
23 April 2026. *Limited places available.*

Registration available via : https://www.joondalupprivate.com.au/For-GPs/GP-Events

Clinical Insight by Dr Cheng Long Lu

FOR GP Evidence insight Precision
Western Respiratory & Sleep