



PRESS RELEASE: World COPD Day, November 15, 2017

World COPD Day: A Look at the Many Faces of COPD

Cape Town, Glenview, Lausanne, Montevideo, New York, Paris, Tokyo, November, 2017 – In support of World COPD Day (15 November), the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) joins patients, health care professionals, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies in coming together today to take action against one of the world’s most prevalent respiratory diseases. The illness, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), is a non-communicable lung disease that progressively robs sufferers of breath. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide¹, causing more than 3 million deaths every year², and more than two thirds of people with the disease don’t know they have it. Dr. Alvar Agusti, Chair of the GOLD Board of Directors, states “appropriate diagnosis is the first, unavoidable, step towards treatment of the disease” on the importance of raising awareness of the increasing prevalence and global economic burden of diagnosing and managing COPD.

Today is the 16th annual World COPD Day, an event held each November to raise awareness of COPD worldwide. World COPD Day is organized by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease, or GOLD (www.goldcopd.org), a World Health Organization collaborative and 501(c)3 organization. This year’s World COPD Day theme, “The Many Faces of COPD,” strives to educate both patients and healthcare practitioners of the many factors that can contribute to COPD (smoking, genetics, environment and air quality, occupational exposures, etc.). Dr. Claus Vogelmeier, Chair of the GOLD Science Committee, states “COPD is classically a smoker’s disease, but in recent years, other important factors were identified”.

COPD is diagnosed using a breathing test called spirometry. This test, which is painless and takes only a few minutes, measures the amount of air a person can breathe out, and the amount of time taken to do so. Researchers are also studying additional ways to identify COPD earlier in the course of disease. “Increased patient education and global

efforts to improve early diagnosis are helping to impact the growing burden of COPD. Smoking cessation programs and interest in developing new treatments as well as efforts to better predict patients' prognoses are leading to renewed optimism in this fight. We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us in this area, but GOLD is dedicated to assisting practitioners around the world by providing best practice strategy for COPD." says Rebecca Decker, Program Director of the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease.

The early stages of COPD are often unrecognized, in part because many individuals discount symptoms such as breathlessness, chronic cough, and bringing up phlegm as a normal part of getting older or an expected consequence of cigarette smoking. There is no cure for COPD, which may also contribute to underdiagnosis of the disease. People whose breathlessness is more severe may find the possibility of finding out that they have COPD frightening, and avoid seeking treatment.

COPD occurs most often in patients who are over age 40 and who have a history of exposure to COPD risk factors. Worldwide, the most commonly encountered risk factor for COPD is cigarette smoking. Other important risk factors include dusts and chemicals encountered on the job and smoke from biomass fuels burned for cooking and heating in poorly ventilated dwellings, especially in developing countries.

In addition, GOLD leaders emphasize that not just cigarettes but other forms of tobacco smoking such as water-pipe smoking are dangerous for the lungs. And because the potential damaging effects of E-cigarettes in the lungs are unknown, these should be considered like regular cigarettes until more information is available. Likewise, the role of E-cigarettes in helping smokers quit is not yet established.

Without treatment, COPD is generally a progressive disease, and as the disease gets worse patients become breathless during everyday activities such as climbing a flight of stairs, walking the dog, or even getting washed and dressed in the morning. COPD treatment is most effective when begun early in the course of the disease. However, at all stages of disease, treatments are available that reduce symptoms such as breathlessness and enable people to participate more fully in daily life.

World COPD Day was first held in 2002, and has grown each year to become one of the most important COPD events globally. On World COPD Day, hundreds of awareness-raising activities will take place in countries all over the world. Further information about GOLD and World COPD Day can be found at www.goldcopd.org. Documents detailing GOLD's global strategy for diagnosis, management, and prevention of COPD are also available at www.goldcopd.org.

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organization comprised of the world's leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally: American Thoracic Society (ATS), American College of Chest Physicians (ACCP), Asociación Latinoamericana De Tórax (ALAT), Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), European Respiratory Society (ERS), Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union) and the Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS). The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.