Breathing is Life – Act Earlier

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies Highlights World COPD Day 2023

For Immediate Release

In support of World COPD Day, on November 15, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), of which Pan African Thoracic Society is a founding member, is highlighting the crucial role of early diagnosis and early intervention in managing COPD. This year’s theme "Breathing is Life – Act Earlier" emphasises that maintaining healthy lungs is essential for our overall well-being, and early action is more critical than ever.

Organized by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD), a member of FIRS, World COPD Day is an annual global initiative to raise awareness, share knowledge and discuss ways to reduce the burden of COPD worldwide.

COPD, a progressive lung disease characterized by breathlessness, chronic sputum production and cough, is a major global health concern. It is estimated that three million people die each year from COPD, and this number is projected to rise due to aging populations and continued exposure to risk factors such as tobacco smoke and air pollution.

While tobacco smoke remains the primary risk factor for COPD, recent research has identified other contributing factors, including genetics and early-life exposures. This underscores the importance of considering lung health throughout one's lifespan, from early development to adulthood.

We now know that there are many other factors besides tobacco smoking that can contribute to COPD and that COPD can start early in life and even affect young individuals. In addition, we have now identified precursor conditions that can provide new opportunities for early diagnosis and prompt treatment, like pre-COPD and PRISm.

Dr. Alvar Agusti, Chair of the GOLD Board of Directors, explains why thinking about COPD earlier is important:
“Understanding the early life origins of COPD may help us target ways to both prevent the disease and slow its progression. There is a higher likelihood of a positive response if we can diagnose the disease at its inception, or in its very early stages.”

This year’s campaign will focus on highlighting the importance of early detection and how we can expand COPD prevention and treatment by acting earlier. This can include preventing early risk factors, monitoring lung health from birth, diagnosing COPD in a precursor state and providing treatment promptly.

Initiatives to reduce the burden of COPD are taking place worldwide, including smoking-cessation programs, tackling both indoor and outdoor air pollution, as well as examining childhood disadvantage factors. Although there is no current cure for COPD, actions to prevent it and improve quality of life can take place anywhere, by a variety of individuals in many types of settings. Employers can strive for safe breathing environments. Citizens can be good stewards of air cleanliness. Both patients and families can help advocate for more research and better access to care, including essential medications, routine lung function screening and other treatments like telehealth access for patients in remote settings.

In addition, providers and policy makers can work together to improve access to spirometry (lung function testing) and advocate for its use as a general health marker at all stages of life, important not only for the diagnosis of lung diseases but also as a general health marker.

Join World COPD Day events on November 15, 2023. Together, we can raise awareness, promote early action, and improve the lives of those affected by COPD. Learn more here.

**About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)**

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organisation comprised of the world's leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally: American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PAT), Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).
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.

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1. **GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR THE DIAGNOSIS, MANAGEMENT, AND PREVENTION OF CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE (2024 REPORT)**