

The Year of the Lung 2010

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Among the members of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), which comprises ATS, ACCP, ALAT, APRS, PATS, UNION and the European Respiratory Society (ERS), it is common belief that respiratory diseases are underestimated, neglected or even ignored by the public, politicians and everyone responsible for health-related issues internationally.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently reported that deaths attributed to respiratory diseases are outnumbered only by cardiovascular deaths. However, while cardiovascular mortality is showing a tendency to decrease, the death rate from respiratory diseases is steadily rising. It is expected that by the year 2020 chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) will be the 3rd leading cause of death worldwide, from the 6th place that it held in 1990.

Currently, it is estimated that approximately 1 billion people suffer from respiratory diseases, such as asthma, COPD, lung cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia, sleep breathing disorders, etc., from which more than 12 million die each year. Although lung diseases are prevalent in all countries, they are commoner among the poorest and weakest populations and in the elderly.

Annually more than 5 million deaths are attributable to smoking, which is however still legal, while more than 1.7 million deaths are caused by the global epidemic of tuberculosis. Despite the fact that pneumonia can now be completely cured, 2 million children die from pneumonia each year in underdeveloped countries. Shockingly, the majority of the 250,000 deaths attributed yearly to asthma are caused by lack of appropriate medical treatment in many parts of the world. Finally, it is estimated by the WHO that half of the world's population resides in or near areas with extremely bad air quality.

Despite the fact that the incidence and mortality rates of lung disease are so impressive, the world community continues to ignore them. For all these reasons, FIRS decided to declare **2010** the **"Year of the Lung"** and to initiate an extensive international campaign promoting public information about respiratory diseases.

The main goals of this campaign are:

1. Increasing public recognition of lung diseases and knowledge about their possible risks.
2. Promoting preventable policies.
3. Demanding more fundings for basic and clinical research.
4. Spreading the message that the prevention of respiratory diseases is

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cost-effective in comparison to their management as pathological conditions.

5. Maintaining the basic right of all people to live in an unpolluted environment.

This effort began in Cancun, Mexico, where all the International Respiratory Societies signed the **Declaration of the Year of the Lung** and undertook responsibility for organizing events on every continent, while working together through various international organizations such as the United Nations, WHO, National Bank and others.

The European campaign was organized by the ERS in collaboration with all the individual national respiratory societies, through the FERS. Each national society participated in this joint effort and planned a variety of events in celebration of the **Year of the Lung**. More specifically, national congresses, scientific events and journals were used in various ways designed to attract the attention of the governments, the media and the public. The Hellenic Thoracic Society (HTS) headed the Greek campaign, successfully promoting the idea of joint action against lung diseases.

As the official representative of 11,000 European pulmonologists, ERS approached major European organizations, including the European Parliament, the European Commission, the National Health Ministers and others. Among the activities organized by the ERS were a variety of interventions in the European Parliament, such as that for the promotion of clean air in Europe (10.3.2010), publishing the ERS Book of clean air, efforts to convince the European representatives to increase the funds for research in pulmonology in FP8 (13.4.2010), promotion of asthma prevention (4.5.2010), and fighting against smoking (3.5.2010) and COPD (28.6.2010).

At the Annual ERS Congress, held in Barcelona, the largest international meeting place for more than 22,500 pulmonologists, the **Year of the Lung** played a prominent part, and references to it were made at the opening ceremony.

World Spirometry Day was held for the first time in October (14.10.2010). This was the first international effort to promote the value of this simple test for the early diagnosis of respiratory diseases, and the first major campaign devoted to lung diseases. The idea originated from the ERS, which also coordinated its implementation worldwide.

The purpose of the campaign was to perform as many free spirometry measurements as possible on the same day all over the world in order to attract the interest of the expectations, since more than 72 countries participated with 700 centres, at which 100,000 spirometry measurements have been reported so far. In Australia, the Philippines, South America and mainly Europe, pulmonologists joined their efforts in this global event in order to promote the campaign for lung diseases. Greece can be described as the World Champion of the event, having performed nearly 5,000 spirometry measurements. I would like to emphasize that the Greek coordination and planning by the HTS were favourably commented on internationally, and to point out that this is another example of what we can achieve when we are united.

Another equally important event during the **Year of the Lung** was the Summit of Health Ministers on Chronic Diseases, where the ERS succeeded in the inclusion of chronic respiratory disorders. This effort will continue with completion of the European Respiratory Roadmap, through which the ERS will propose new plans for the management of epidemics of chronic respiratory disease in Europe over the next decades. We are hoping that these interventions will lead to positive reactions by the European Council of Health Ministers at the end of the year.

Finally, the celebration of the **Year of the Lung** was concluded in Portugal, during the Annual Congress of Portuguese Pulmonologists.

It is our strong belief that this first international effort to rouse people all over the world and unite them in the war against lung diseases was very successful. We were pleasantly surprised by the participation of pulmonologists from all different parts of the planet, confirming the necessity and utility of such initiatives. However, this campaign alone is not enough to make a sustained difference. It needs to be followed by planning, and the introduction of solutions and National, European and Global actions.

REFERENCES

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