

PRESS RELEASE

Landmark Study Demonstrates True Impact of COPD in Middle East and Africa with over 13 Million People Affected¹, Less Than One Third of which Diagnosed or on Appropriate Treatment

Beirut, 11 December 2012: Results of the landmark population-based BREATHE Study, the first regional research on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) in the Middle East and Africa (MEA) just announced by GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), suggest more than 13 million people in the region suffer from the disease due to cigarette smoking.

“This number seems conservative given that other risk factors such as waterpipe smoking or exposure to burning biomass fuel were not considered in the calculation,” said Dr. Marie Louise Coussa-Koniski, Associate Professor of Medicine at the Lebanese-American University and Head of the Respiratory Diseases Division at Beirut’s Rizk Hospital who represented Lebanon on the Study’s international steering committee. “The prevalence estimate also appears to be the tip of the iceberg as the proportion of people at risk of COPD is over 30%, representing a potential ‘waiting room’ for the disease.”

The BREATHE Study showed the prevalence rate in Lebanon to be as high as **5.3%** among people aged 40 and older. The overall prevalence in the 11 countries covered is 3.6%, which is almost similar to the proportion of the population who have asthma or chronic heart failure and 10 times higher than the proportion of those suffering from epilepsy in the same age group. Until now, little information has been available concerning the prevalence of COPD in MEA, and the true extent of the disease burden in this region has been largely unrecognised.

“The BREATHE study has for the first time quantified the true burden of COPD, both in terms of its societal cost and the impact the disease has on patients and their families in the region,” said Dr Georges Khayat, Lebanese Pulmonary Society President. “The findings are a call to action for us to improve the prevention, diagnosis, management and quality of life of all people with this chronic condition in Lebanon.”

Mortality and disability from COPD are expected to rise in developing countries over the coming decades, primarily due to the increased rate of smoking. The BREATHE Study findings revealed that smoking remains a major and growing public health issue in the region with rates as high as 30%.

A number of other important findings also emerged from the BREATHE Study that will have a significant impact on the management of COPD in the MEA region. The Study revealed that less than 10% of treatment use is compliant with current international treatment guidelines. Furthermore, the health economic burden of managing the disease is huge; a total of 1,000 consultations, 190 emergency visits and 175 hospitalisations per hour are attributable to COPD across the 11 countries where the study was conducted.

The BREATHE Study revealed that many patients are poorly informed about COPD and its management and much can be done to improve disease education. Thirty percent of patients are not sure of the underlying cause of their disease, while 50% do not acknowledge smoking as a potential cause. More worryingly, 65% of those patients diagnosed with COPD are still smoking on a regular basis.

Aly Ziwar, Medical Director at GSK stated that, “the BREATHE Study represents a cornerstone for building a long-lasting commitment to improving respiratory care in the MEA region. The study will be published in Respiratory Medicine before year-end. We hope that the increased awareness of the BREATHE Study findings will inform public health planning through governments and health service managers and ultimately improve the lives of patients living with this chronic debilitating disease.”

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***For more information, or to schedule interviews with spokespeople,
please contact: Jean Akouri, Akouri Communications
P.O Box 16-5697, Beirut, Lebanon. Phone: +961-(0)3-571579. E-mail: jean@akouricom.com***

About the BREATHE Study

The BREATHE Study (an oBservational cRoss-sEctionAl epidemiology sTudy in cHronic obstructive pulmonary disease in the MEA region) was conducted in 11 countries in the MEA region with over 60,000 subjects in order to estimate the prevalence of symptoms of COPD within the general population.

Subjects aged 40 years or older living in the MEA countries were recruited for the study via a selection process using randomly generated telephone numbers. The subsequent telephone interviews identified individuals likely to have COPD, and these patients were asked to complete a more detailed questionnaire that assessed risk factors, disease history, symptoms, impact on daily life, management of the disease and its financial impact. In total, 457,258 telephone numbers were generated and contact was established with 210,121 subjects, of whom 83,447 were eligible and 62,086 agreed to participate. The overall response rate was 74.2% reflecting high representativeness of the study population.

About COPD

‘COPD’ is short for Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. This is a general name given to a number of conditions including chronic bronchitis and emphysema. COPD causes the airways in the lungs to become narrower, making it more difficult for the air to move into and out of the lungs.

COPD is usually noticed in the first instance as a cough, which gradually becomes more persistent. Over time, sufferers may find that they become short of breath, even when they are resting. People with COPD are also at greater risk of chest infections, and this can make their symptoms worse in the short term.

About GlaxoSmithKline

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), one of the world’s leading research-based pharmaceutical and healthcare companies, is committed to improving the quality of human life by enabling people to do more, feel better and live longer. For further information please visit www.gsk.com.

References

1. Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of COPD (2011 Revision)
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