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Education for Health and Other Leading Experts Call for National Strategies to Tackle COPD - An Emerging Epidemic in the Workforce

- *New report highlights devastating impact of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) in people of working age -*

- *Nearly 1 in 5 45-68 year olds with COPD surveyed were forced to retire prematurely -*

LONDON, UK - November 17, 2010 – COPD Uncovered 2010, a new report issued today, exposes the devastating economic, social and personal impact of COPD in the 40–65 years age group – the mainstay of the global workforce^{1,2}. These results have led respiratory experts to call for the implementation of National Strategies to tackle this disease in the working age population.

Authored by Education for Health and other leading specialists, the report uncovers the true cost of COPD in the working age population and reveals its significant impact on work and quality of life. The authors are appealing to policy makers, the medical community and other stakeholders such as employers to create and implement tactics such as earlier diagnosis and management, in order to keep people healthy and productive for longer³.

“It’s an economic time-bomb” said Monica Fletcher, Chief Executive of Education for Health. “The key generation driving the economy in most countries are people aged 40–65 years and in this harsh economic climate, we need to ensure they stay active and productive. With the incidence of COPD set to rise, with increasing numbers of women being affected than previously thought, it can only mean that personal and societal cost will also increase.”

“COPD is often considered a disease of old men, but there are far more people aged under 65 years with this condition than previously recognised. We are calling for policy makers to prioritise the early diagnosis and integrated management of COPD in this population”.

COPD has wide ranging implications not only for the affected individual, but also for the wider community. According to the report, in the UK alone, the economic burden of disease is UK£1.5 billion per annum⁵ a similar cost to that incurred by European airlines due to the recent Icelandic ash cloud! This includes not only direct healthcare costs, but factors such as lost income tax, payment of state benefits and productivity loss due to COPD. These calculations are based on the current age of retirement, but as many people expect to have to work beyond their official retirement date⁶, the economic impact will continue to rise.

COPD is rapidly becoming one of the world’s most serious health issues, affecting 210 million people worldwide⁴, but only half of these people have been diagnosed. COPD can dramatically impair the productivity of this population. However, it is preventable and treatable and we encourage those with symptoms such as persistent cough with phlegm, breathlessness or a wheezy chest to visit their healthcare provider for a lung function test.

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OTHER KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE REPORT INCLUDE:

- **SOCIETY FACES A DOUBLE ECONOMIC IMPACT FROM THE GROWING COPD CRISIS** - Patients are losing an average of \$1800 per year in lost income due to their COPD, which equates to lifetime losses of nearly \$20,000³. In addition, nearly 1 in 5 of 45-68 year olds are forced to retire prematurely due to the condition, thereby incurring increased health costs and reducing personal contribution from taxation³.
- **COPD PLACES A SIGNIFICANT COST IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS** - Individuals of working age are most often managed within the primary care setting and this places increasing demands on primary care services⁷. However, as COPD severity increases, so does the requirement for patients to be seen in emergency departments or to require hospitalization. It is these hospitalizations that are responsible for the majority of the direct costs associated with COPD⁸.
- **PEOPLE WITH COPD FEEL UNABLE TO CONFIDENTLY PLAN FOR THE FUTURE** - The impact of COPD on people's earning power and overall household income makes them concerned about its future impact on their lives, and those of their family, and their ability to maintain the same lifestyle as they had before³.
- **SMOKING RATES REMAIN HIGH REGARDLESS OF DISEASE SEVERITY** – Although smoking cessation is the only known intervention to alter progression and prognosis of COPD, the report reveals that almost half of patients with mild disease continue to smoke⁹, and that even if everyone did stop smoking today, the rates of COPD would still continue to increase for the next 20 years¹⁰. People with COPD need to receive early and appropriate management including access to pulmonary rehabilitation services along with appropriate pharmacological intervention in order to keep the disease under control and avoid exacerbations.

About COPD

COPD is a debilitating, life-threatening and progressive lung disease that interferes with normal breathing¹¹. Symptoms are often mistakenly attributed to ageing or other respiratory diseases such as asthma, resulting in COPD being undetected in about 50% of cases¹² and misdiagnosed in about 23%¹³. A 30% increase in prevalence is expected by the year 2030¹⁴. The estimated prevalence of COPD includes approximately 4-13% of adults in Europe¹⁵⁻¹⁹ and approximately 7% of adults in the United States²⁰. While COPD was previously more common in men, an increase in smoking among women has led to the disease affecting men and women almost equally⁴. There is no cure for COPD but it can be treated.

About COPD Uncovered

COPD Uncovered represents the combined efforts of a multi-disciplinary committee of international experts, coming together to bring forward some of the most burning issues in COPD today. Their aim is to highlight the impact of COPD in an understudied and ignored patient segment between the ages of 40 and 65.

The COPD Uncovered initiative is a compendium of research and analysis undertaken by experts in respiratory health. COPD Uncovered was first initiated by Education for Health



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and Novartis Pharma AG. Novartis Pharma AG is providing financial support for this initiative, including by commissioning a number of underlying studies. COPD is also administered by a secretariat from Chandler Chicco Agency (CCA).

The first report from the initiative was published on World COPD Day 2009²¹. It revealed that more than two billion working hours are lost each week worldwide due to the condition, and that if left unchecked, COPD could have significant global workforce and economic implications on patients, families, employers and society as the disease escalates. The report called for collaborative efforts from all stakeholders to advance our knowledge of COPD, dispel some of the myths surrounding the condition, and ultimately improve disease management for patients in this key population.

About the Authors

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To download a copy of the COPD Uncovered report, visit:

<http://bit.ly/cuiaML>

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