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Launch of Global Alliance Against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD)

Hundreds of millions suffer from chronic respiratory diseases

Beijing, 28 March, 2006 -- Today, the Global Alliance Against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) is being launched in Beijing, China. The alliance is a global voluntary alliance of 41 national and international organizations focused on reducing the global disease burden of chronic respiratory diseases by integrating and strengthening surveillance, prevention and treatment efforts.

Currently, hundreds of millions of people suffer from chronic respiratory diseases, including 300 million people with asthma, 80 million people with moderate to severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and millions of others with mild COPD, allergic rhinitis, and other chronic respiratory diseases, which are often undiagnosed. WHO estimates that some 4 million people died of chronic respiratory diseases (CRD) in 2005 and that total deaths will increase by 30% in the next 10 years, if action is not taken now.

“The goal of GARD,” says Professor Jean Bousquet, GARD chairman, “is to reduce the global burden of chronic respiratory diseases. As the prevalence and global burden of chronic respiratory diseases are expected to increase considerably in the near future, it is clear that immediate action is greatly needed and the cost for inaction is unacceptable.”

The key objectives for GARD involve a comprehensive approach to fight chronic respiratory diseases and in many cases will build on already existing initiatives. They include:

- Developing a standard way of obtaining data on risk factors and disease burden of chronic respiratory diseases. This will help define strategies and raise chronic respiratory diseases on the global and local health agendas (as a public health priority).
- Encouraging countries to implement health promotion and chronic disease prevention policies such as tobacco control in order to reduce the burden of chronic respiratory disease as well as other chronic diseases.
- Making recommendations for how to provide simple and affordable strategies for the management of chronic respiratory diseases for all patients in all countries. Strategies will focus on early diagnosis and appropriate and affordable treatments, because chronic respiratory diseases are largely under-diagnosed and under-treated.

In China, an estimated 17% of all deaths are due to chronic respiratory diseases. “Rapid urbanization in China has contributed to the sharp rise in chronic disease risk factors such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet. By creating a supportive environment where healthy choices are easy and accessible, healthy life years will be added for individuals and the society at large,” says Dr Henk Bekedam, WHO Representative to China.

WHO advocates an integrated approach to prevention and care for all leading chronic diseases. Integrated approaches that combine chronic respiratory diseases prevention and management with a similar approach for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other chronic diseases are necessary because the diseases share common risk factors and require similar responses from the health system. The integrated approach is not only best for prevention and management, it is also cost-effective. This approach is outlined in the recent released report, *Preventing chronic diseases a vital investment*, which also called for a Global Goal to

reduce death rates from chronic respiratory diseases and other chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes by an additional 2% per year over and above existing trends during the next 10 years, to 2015.

Note to editors:

Information about GARD is available on:

<http://www.who.int/respiratory/gard/en>

Information about Preventing chronic diseases: a vital investment is available on:

http://www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/en/

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