For a few years now, I cannot go to the market by myself: the walk is simply too long. Because of that, I don't see my friends as often as I would like. Before my diagnosis, I had never heard about COPD. I thought coughing every day, and wheezing from time to time, was normal at my age. Now I know that smoking has caused my breathing problems.

(Moufida Afaf Malta, Lattakia, Syrian Arab Republic)

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The Alliance... up and running
Welcome to the first edition of the newsletter of the newly-established Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) through which collaborators and other interested parties will be updated on the activities of the Alliance. I hope that this newsletter will provide information, generate discussion on surveillance, prevention and control of chronic respiratory disease, and encourage initiatives to achieve the aims of GARD. Moufida from the Syrian Arab Republic, is only one example of the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from a chronic respiratory disease. Chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), are silent killers, neglected but leading causes of death. Every ten seconds someone dies of COPD. The disease is no longer a characteristic of high-income countries, but low- and middle-income countries are confronted with the challenge of combating this major public health problem. While smoking is one of the biggest risk factors in high-income countries, exposure to biomass fuels, such as wood and coal used for cooking, is one of the biggest risk factors in African countries. However, chronic respiratory diseases are preventable and can be prevented, and that's the mission of this Alliance: to prevent chronic respiratory diseases, to mitigate their consequences, and to enhance the quality of life of people with a chronic respiratory disease. GARD was launched in March 2006 in Beijing, China, to help stop this global epidemic. Through combining our strengths and knowledge with those of our partners, we can make a difference. We can achieve results that no single partner could attain alone. GARD can make people's lives easier: we want to live in a world where all people breathe freely.

Dr. Nikolai Khaltaev, Responsible Officer for GARD, World Health Organization

Rohan Bhayana, 10 years old, is the face on the Alliance promotional flyer. Although he has asthma, he enjoys running around and playing outdoors. With help from paediatricians, he has learned to control and treat his asthma.
What is the Alliance?

GARD is a voluntary alliance of national and international organizations, institutions and agencies committed to the common goal of improving global lung health. The Alliance is part of WHO’s global work to prevent and control chronic diseases. Because most chronic respiratory diseases are under-diagnosed and under-treated, and access to essential medications in many countries is poor, a global effort to improve diagnosis and medical care is needed. GARD improves the coordination between existing governmental and nongovernmental programmes, to avoid duplication of effort and wastage of resources. Towards its vision of a world where all people breathe freely, the main objective of GARD is to initiate a comprehensive approach to fight chronic respiratory diseases by:

- developing a standard way of obtaining relevant data on chronic respiratory disease risk factors;
- encouraging countries to implement health promotion and chronic respiratory disease prevention policies; and
- recommending simple strategies for management of chronic respiratory diseases.

GARD also promotes an integrated approach that recognizes synergies between chronic respiratory diseases and other chronic diseases. GARD focuses specifically on the needs of low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable populations, and fosters country-specific initiatives that are tailored to local needs.

Participants of the Alliance

Global launch in Beijing, People’s Republic of China

The official launch of GARD was held on 28 March 2006 at the Presidential Plaza Hotel, Beijing, China. Statements were made by Dr Longde Wang, Vice-Minister of Health, China, and Dr Henk-Jan Bekedam, WHO Representative in China. Other key experts presented an overview of the burden of chronic respiratory diseases around the world and called for a global effort to control this major public health problem. A total of 50 different international and local media representatives were present during the launch. The launch ceremony was followed by a GARD General Meeting that convened all the collaborating parties.

Press materials:

- Launch Press Release in English [pdf 114kb]
- Launch Press Release in Chinese [pdf 227kb]
- Press Summary [pdf 70kb]
- Fact Sheet [pdf 73kb]
- Questions & Answers [pdf 46kb]
- Media Advisory [pdf 27kb]

"The goal of GARD is to reduce the global burden of chronic respiratory diseases. As the prevalence and burden of chronic respiratory diseases are expected to increase considerably in the near future, it is clear that immediate action is needed: the cost of inaction is unacceptable."

Prof Jean Bousquet, GARD Chairman
The regional launch of GARD in Latin America, took place on 17 August 2006 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, during the XIV Latin American Congress of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. The aim of this regional launch was to promote GARD in Latin America. More than 800 participants from the region and beyond attended this successful meeting, which resulted in broad press coverage in the regional media.

Presentations included:
- Opening (Nikolai Khaltaev)
- The burden of chronic respiratory diseases (Giovanni Viegi)
- Chronic respiratory diseases in Latin America. PLATINO Study (Rogelio Pérez Padilla)
- Asthma and rhinitis epidemiology in Latin America (Carlos E Baena Cagnani)
- Health promotion and prevention of chronic respiratory diseases (Ronald Dahl)
- GARD Action Plan (Jean Bousquet)

Media coverage of the launch:

Unas 80 millones de personas sufren EPOC, un trastorno incapacitante, Infobae Diario, 22/08/2006

Aplicarán un plan para frenar los males respiratorios, La Gaceta, 23/08/2006

Among the Latin American countries, Brazil is a pioneer in creating an Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases at country level. The Alliance was officially launched on 7 October 2006 during the 33rd Brazilian Paediatric Society Meeting. This Alliance brings together chronic respiratory disease experts and other health professionals in Brazil to work towards the common goal of improving lung health, as an integral part of the work of GARD.

Press and advocacy materials (clickable links):

Brazilian Fact Sheet - English
Brazilian Fact Sheet - Portuguese
Launch GARD Brazil Q&A - English
Launch GARD Brazil Q&A - Portuguese
GARD Promotional flyer - English
GARD Promotional flyer - Portuguese

All presentations of the launches are available on the GARD website:
www.who.int/gard/events
Although relatively few people have heard of it, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) kills on average one person every 10 seconds. COPD is not a simple smoker’s cough, but an under-diagnosed, life-threatening lung disease. Worldwide, eighty million people have moderate to severe COPD. The most common symptoms of COPD are breathlessness or a ‘need for air’, excessive sputum production, and a chronic cough.

To support World COPD Day in 2006, WHO, in collaboration with the International Coalition against COPD and the COPD Foundation developed a special feature on COPD. In “Face to Face with COPD”, people living with COPD describe their life-threatening disease and how it has affected them and their families. Their testimonies demonstrate the strong and personal impact of chronic respiratory diseases on individuals and their families.

World COPD Day is an annual event organized by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease to improve awareness and care of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) around the world. The theme of World COPD Day 2006 was “Breathless, not helpless!”.

Links:
World COPD Day web site
Face to Face with COPD feature

GARD Session during the first African Congress on Tobacco or Health, 8 December 2006

During the African Congress on Tobacco or Health, in Casablanca, Morocco, on 7−10 December 2006, GARD organized a special session on chronic respiratory diseases. In African countries, tobacco consumption is increasing alarmingly. According to the WHO Global Infobase Online, the following estimates for 2005 are made for current smokers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambia</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tobacco consumption causes diseases, such as chronic respiratory diseases, not only in active smokers but also in passive smokers, the most vulnerable being children. Tobacco smoking, indoor air and outdoor pollution are among the most important risk factors for preventable chronic respiratory diseases.

Programme of the GARD session
Web site African Congress on Tobacco or Health

2007 GARD General Meeting in Seoul, Republic of Korea

The next General Meeting will be hosted by the Korean Asthma Allergy Foundation in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 1−2 June 2007. This gathering of all collaborating parties is an excellent opportunity to meet partners, exchange information on chronic respiratory diseases worldwide from different sectors and perspectives, reviewing GARD achievements of the past year, and discuss important issues for the coming year. It will be also a unique chance to welcome new applicants to the Alliance. The provisional agenda for the meeting will soon be available on the GARD web site.
Advocacy materials and publications

General Meeting Report
2006, Beijing, China [3.08Mb]

Updated GINA asthma Management Guidelines
Updated GOLD COPD Guidelines

Promotional Flyer
(the flyer is available online in English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish)

WHO COPD Fact sheet
WHO Asthma Fact Sheet

Who are the participants of the Alliance?

In the next issue of the newsletter, which is planned for the end of June, one or two participants of the Alliance will be highlighted in order to introduce them to other participants and to facilitate collaboration.

Upcoming events on chronic respiratory diseases

22–24 February 2007
Vancouver, Canada
11th Annual Conference of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease North America Region
More information

23–27 February 2007
San Diego, USA
AAAAI 63rd Annual Meeting
More information

28 February–1 March 2007
San Diego, USA
WHO InterAirways Workshop – Interactions between upper and lower airways
More information

23–25 March 2007
Taormina, Italy
5th ERS Lung Science Conference
More information

11–13 April 2007
Paris, France
CFA-SFAICANAFORCAL2007 2ème congrès francophone d’allergologie (CFA)
More information

18–20 April 2007
London, United Kingdom
GA² LEN Annual Conference
More information

25–29 April 2007
Antalya, Turkey
9th Annual Congress
Turkish Thoracic Society
More information

1 May 2007
Worldwide
World Asthma Day
More information

18 – 23 May 2007
San Francisco, USA
ATS International Conference
More information

31 May 2007
Worldwide
World No tobacco Day
More information

31 May–2 June 2007
Tbilisi, Georgia
1st International congress of the Georgian Respiratory Association
More information

22 – 26 June 2007
Istanbul, Turkey
World Asthma Meeting
More information
We welcome your comments and suggestions on this newsletter. If you would like to subscribe/unsubscribe to this newsletter, please e-mail us:

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