Setting out the strategic direction for GARD

Our annual milestone, the GARD General Meeting, will take place in Istanbul, Turkey, from 30-31 May 2008. For the third year in succession all representatives from GARD collaborating parties across the world will have the opportunity to exchange information and experiences on how to fight chronic respiratory diseases more effectively. A draft action plan for GARD has been prepared, in line with WHO’s global strategy against noncommunicable diseases, which has chronic respiratory diseases as one of its priority diseases.

One of the major accomplishments since the 2007 General Meeting has been the substantial increase in the number of countries interested in joining GARD. It pleases me greatly to tell you that there are now 40 countries committed to GARD and its mission. The number of collaborating parties has also grown - now standing at 79 - among which many are governmental institutions.

GARD also launched its first major publication, “Global surveillance, prevention and control of chronic respiratory diseases: a comprehensive approach” in the past year. A second important publication named the “GARD Basket” is also now available, which contains a package of information, surveillance tools and guidelines to help countries in their fight against chronic respiratory diseases.

GARD has a functioning governance structure comprising the Executive Committee, the Planning Group and the General Meeting. Together with GARD secretariat in WHO it ensures proper management and communication.

GARD is honoured that Dr Ala Alwan, Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, WHO will attend this year’s General Meeting to discuss how GARD can be part of a global strategy for prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. Representatives from the Ministries of Health of Turkey and Portugal will also present at this year’s meeting. One of the key tasks of this year’s meeting is to discuss and debate the draft GARD action plan. The five year plan sets out a clear vision, goal, purpose and strategic objectives for GARD between 2008 and 2013, with indicators and milestones along each step of the way to evaluate performance. The draft GARD action plan is a result-based management tool that can be used by GARD participants and working groups to mobilize resources for the alliance. It can also be taken as a model for bold country initiatives.

One of the most common reasons for people of all ages to visit a doctor is a complaint of the respiratory tract. This places a special responsibility on health professionals working in the field of respiratory illnesses. In many cases, respiratory symptoms are a marker of the presence of other diseases and the knowledge of co-morbidities and complications are very central to the correct handling of a respiratory case. Health care professionals that take care of respiratory disorders must have a general understanding and knowledge of diseases in general, and plans for prevention and management shall be integrated, focusing on primary care.

I would also like to take this opportunity to praise two of the major figures of GARD, our colleagues Nikolai Khaltaev and Jean Bousquet. 2007 has been a year where both have received well-deserved recognition for their unserving efforts to fight respiratory illnesses. Nikolai’s contribution granted him an important award by the World Allergy Organization last year, and another this year from GARD Turkey and the Turkish Thoracic Society. Jean has just received the World Lung Health award from the American Thoracic Society.

Ronald Dahl, GARD Vice-Chairman
Past President of the European Respiratory Society
2008: What's new in GARD

2008 General Meeting
30 - 31 May, Istanbul, Turkey

The 2008 General Meeting, will see about 70 partners come together to set out the strategic directions for GARD for the next five years and discuss the challenges ahead. This annual event is an ideal forum for GARD partners from across the world to exchange experiences, network, discuss and review the achievements of the past year.

In Turkey, more than 5 million people suffer from asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). COPD is the third cause of death in Turkey and only one out of 10 COPD patients is actually aware that he or she has the disease. The country is responding and taking action to the call of WHO to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases. The Turkish Thoracic Society (TTS) started to prepare in collaboration with the Ministry of Health a “National Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Chronic Airway Diseases”, using and adopting the GARD approach. The National Action Plan stipulates the targets and objectives of how to respond to the burden of noncommunicable diseases, inclusive chronic respiratory diseases and its risk factors. Several Turkish non-governmental organizations have pledged to support the Action Plan.

Provisional programme 2008 General Meeting

On 29 May 2008, the day before the General Meeting opens, GARD Turkey will officially launch in Istanbul. Full coverage on the launch in our next issue.

GARD Chairman receives World Lung Health Award

The American Thoracic Society (ATS) is one of the largest and most respected professional respiratory societies in the world and it has established the World Lung Health Award. The World Lung Health Award is given to individuals who have contributed to world lung health in the areas of basic research or clinical research, delivery of health care, continuing education or care of patients with lung disease.

Professor Jean Bousquet, GARD Chairman, is the recipient of this year's award and it was presented to him on 18 May 2008 at the ATS International Meeting in Toronto, Canada. "This award doesn't only recognizes his many years of work in the field of respiratory diseases, but it is at the same time a great recognition to the work of GARD", says Professor Hapewell of the ATS. ATS, one of the founding partners of the alliance, is an important participant of the alliance and GARD is very grateful for its strong commitment and continued support.

World Asthma Day - 6 May 2008

World Asthma Day is an annual event organized by the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) to improve asthma awareness and care around the world. This year's theme was "You can control your asthma". This year, asthma was highlighted on the WHO home page, a site that receives over 200 000 hits a day. In addition, Dr Alvaro Cruz (WHO) and Professor Jean Bousquet (GARD Chairman) were interviewed by the West African Democracy Radio (Senegal) to discuss what exactly asthma is, its burden worldwide and how it can be prevented.

Listen here for the interview in English
Listen here for the interview in French
World Asthma Day web site
GARD Demonstration projects

GARD demonstration projects provide means for dissemination of beneficial innovations for the surveillance, prevention and control of chronic respiratory diseases. Currently demonstration projects are taking place in Brazil, Finland, South Africa and the United States of America.

Brazil

Minas Gerais - Reduction in hospitalizations and emergency room visits in asthmatic children and adolescents after enrolment in a public asthma programme for low-income families, Belo Horizonte City

Belo Horizonte, located in the southeastern region of Brazil, has 2.4 million inhabitants, a third of whom are under 18 years old. Prevalence surveys demonstrated that 40% of infants less than 15 months old and 20% of adolescents aged 13-14 years had suffered from at least one episode of wheezing over the past 12 months. After a first hospitalization for acute asthma, 50% of the patients were readmitted within the next three months. High prevalence rates combined with lack of affordability of inhaled steroids led to higher asthma morbidity. Acute episodes were one of the leading causes of hospital admissions and readmissions in children and adolescents.

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Bahia - Impact of a public health intervention for management of severe asthma on health resource utilization and costs

Salvador, a city with 2.7 million inhabitants is located in the northeastern state of Bahia. The city has one of the highest rates of asthma prevalence among adolescents in the world, with more than one in four adolescents reporting symptoms of asthma in the previous year. The standard strategy for asthma management in the public health system in Brazil was limited to treatment of exacerbation with bronchodilators and systemic corticosteroids. The Programme for Control of Asthma and Allergic Rhinitis (ProAR), a research project of the Federal University of Bahia School of Medicine, in collaboration with the State and City departments of public health and supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, operates in Salvador to provide care and medication for patients with severe asthma for free. The visits are complemented by education sessions to patients and family members. Four reference centres for severe asthma have been established since 2003, all staffed by pulmonary physicians, nurses and pharmacists who build on capacity building of primary care professionals. By April 2007, 2385 severe asthmatics had entered the ProAR programme.

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Finland

Finnish Allergy Programme

Allergy is a disorder of the immune system often also referred to as atopy. Allergic reactions occur to environmental substances known as allergens. In Finland, sensitization rates to common allergens (one or more positive skin prick test result) are approaching 50%; a population study in 2003 showed that 43% of school aged Finnish children were sensitized, and in 2006, that was true for 47% of the adults. The Finish Allergy Programme is based upon the experience from the Finish Asthma Programme. The Allergy Programme is an educational action plan, which takes the advantage of the contact person network created during the Asthma Programme. The aim is to educate and train physicians and nurses in each municipal healthcare centre. In addition, also pharmacists will receive a similar training.

The general aim of the Finish Allergy Programme is to reduce the allergy burden in 2008–2018, and has six main goals:

- To prevent the development of allergy symptoms: prevalence of asthma, allergic rhinitis and atopic eczema is decreased by 20%;
- To increase tolerance against allergens: number of subjects on elimination diets caused by food allergy are decreased by 50%;
- To improve allergy diagnostics: all patients are tested in quality certified allergy testing centres;
- To reduce work-related allergies: allergic diseases defined as occupational are decreased by 50%;
- To allocate resources to manage and prevent exacerbations of severe allergies: “Allergy Control Cards” are in use in the whole country and emergency visits caused by asthma are decreased by 40%; and
- To decrease costs due to allergic diseases: predefined costs are reduced by 20%.

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South Africa

PALSA Plus (Practical Approach to Lung Health in high-HIV prevalence countries)

South Africa faces a chronic respiratory disease burden which includes a mix of infectious (with very high rates of tuberculosis and HIV co-infection) and non-infectious diseases. While the prevalence of asthma is similar to the global average, a recent population study suggested a very high prevalence of COPD.

National, provincial and municipal health departments deliver through a network of 4500 primary health care clinics across the country. These clinics provide health care for around 80% of the population. However, the critical shortage of physicians and nurses is a major obstacle to the quality of health care on offer. A policy of nurse-led primary care applies in most rural and even urban clinics. Free essential drugs for chronic respiratory diseases, including TB and antiretrovirals, are available at these clinics but access to care is limited by clinic capacity.

PALSA Plus has successfully been adapted in South Africa from the World Health Organization’s Practical approach to Lung Health (PAL) initiative. PALSA Plus is an integrated plan used primarily by primary care nurses for the management of priority respiratory diseases including TB and HIV co-infection. The approach was first used in a randomized control trial in the Free State Province and led to significant improvements in TB case detection, appropriate referral of TB severe cases, inhaled corticosteroid provision for asthma sufferers and voluntary HIV counseling and testing uptake among TB clients. Through a collaborative process of workshops with expert clinicians, managers and policy-makers, the PALSA Plus guideline has been expanded and adapted to the local settings and current clinical protocols.

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United States of America

Learn More, Breathe Better

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) has developed a nationwide campaign — Learn More, Breathe Better — to increase awareness and understanding of COPD and its risk factors and to underscore the benefits of early detection and treatment in slowing the disease and improving the quality of life.

The campaign is for men and women over age 45, especially those who smoke or have smoked, and those with risk associated with genetics or environmental exposures. In addition, the campaign aims to reach people who have been diagnosed with COPD as well as health care providers, particularly those in the primary care setting.

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Asthma IQ: A web-based tool to assist proper implementation of asthma guidelines

The “Asthma Specialist Tool to Help Manage Asthma and Improve Quality” (ASTHMA IQ) is a first-of-its-kind web-based tool designed and developed by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI). The tool helps physicians better understand and apply the new National Asthma Education and Prevention Programme of NHLBI in order to improve the quality of care delivered to their patients with asthma.

Based upon the patient’s age, asthma impairment, and asthma risk, ASTHMA IQ helps to select the most appropriate severity or control level and initiate or adjust therapies. The tool provides graphical overviews of a patient’s status and asthma history. The reports generated by ASTHMA IQ can reflect a single visit, progress over time, or other information useful for the physician in managing the patient’s care and to help educate the patient. Customized asthma action plans can be developed within the tool and then handed to the patient.

Read more online
Composition of GARD Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is responsible for the management of GARD, and offers overall strategic direction and guidance. It analyses all proposals presented by the Planning Group before these are presented to the General Meeting for its endorsement/approval. A short profile of each member:

Jean Bousquet (GARD Chairman)
Professor Jean Bousquet is Professor of Pulmonary Medicine at the University of Montpellier. For 13 years, he was the Director of the INSERM Laboratory for the Immunopathology of Asthma. His research focused on the pathophysiology and treatment of asthma. He then examined the inter-relation between asthma and rhinitis, particularly in severely-affected patients. Professor Bousquet was also the editor-in-chief of the European Respiratory Review and is currently the editor-in-chief of Allergy. He is Vice-President of the European Union-funded network of excellence GA2LEN (Global Allergy and Asthma European Network), has chaired GINA (Global Initiative for Asthma) and was the founder of ARIA (Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma).

Ronald Dahl (GARD Vice-Chairman)
Ronald Dahl graduated as MD from Aarhus University, Denmark in 1973 and since 1994 has been professor of Respiratory Diseases at the Aarhus University. His main research has been clinical investigations in obstructive lung diseases. Other research areas include studies on tobacco cessation, indoor air, house dust mite allergy, immunotherapy for rhinitis and asthma and “united airways”. He has been the editor-in-chief of Respiratory Medicine and on the editorial board of several allergy and respiratory journals. He has previously served on the boards of: Danish Respiratory Society (secretary general), Danish Society for Allergology (chair), Nordic Forum for Allergy Research (chair), Global Initiative for Asthma (member of the group), European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (member of the board), the European Respiratory Society (president 2004-2005) and the World Allergy Organization, (member of the board). He is currently chair of the Danish Respiratory Society, advisory editor for The Clinical Respiratory Journal and a member of the board of Interasma.

Álvaro A. Cruz (GARD secretariat)
Working in WHO Headquarters in Geneva since 2006, Dr Cruz helped finalizing several WHO Publications such as “Global surveillance, prevention and control of chronic respiratory diseases”, the 2007 GARD General Meeting Report and “GARD Basket”. He is coordinating all projects related to GARD, in close collaboration with various WHO Clusters, Regional and Country Offices, as well as with experts, Ministries of Health and GARD collaborating parties. Prior to working in Geneva, Dr Cruz was an Associate Professor of Medicine of Federal University of Bahia, Brazil. During his time at the university, Dr Cruz developed an intervention project for the control of severe asthma in public health, which rapidly and markedly reduced admissions and mortality due to asthma in the City of Salvador (2.7 million inhabitants).

Eric Bateman
Professor Eric Bateman is Professor of Respiratory Medicine at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, Director of the University of Cape Town Lung Institute and Head of the Division of Pulmonology and the Department of Critical Care at the Groote Schuur Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa. With research interests including the management of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and tuberculosis, Professor Bateman is currently Chair of the Global Initiative for Asthma. His interest in community-based interventions to improve the care of patients with chronic respiratory diseases, especially in under-resourced countries has led to the formation of the Knowledge Translation Unit (KTU) at the Lung Institute he heads. Over the last 5 years the KTU has had considerable success in adapting, researching and implementing the Practical Approach to Lung Health (PALSA Plus) developed by the WHO in several provinces in South Africa.

Carlos Baena-Cagnani
Carlos Baena-Cagnani is a professor in the Postgraduate Department of the Faculty of Medicine at the Catholic University, Cordoba, Argentina, as well as Professor of Paediatric Respiratory in the School of Specialty within the Faculty of Medicine at Genoa University. He is a member of the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, American Academy of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology, American Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, American Thoracic Society, Italian society of Respiratory Medicine, Argentinean Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Latin American Society of Allergy Asthma and Immunology, Latin American Thoracic Society, European Respiratory Society and American College of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology. He was president of the World Allergy Organisation from 2003–2005 and is Vice-President of the International Association of Asthmology.
GARD secretariat

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