

Call for increased awareness of COPD on World COPD Day 2009

- *COPD estimated to affect over 300,000 people in Ireland* -

Tuesday 17th November 2009: A nationwide drive to raise awareness of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) has been launched today to coincide with World COPD Day 2009 tomorrow, 18th November. World COPD Day is an annual event to improve global awareness of COPD. The theme of this year's Day is **Breathless not Helpless!** The awareness drive in Ireland is being supported by the Irish Thoracic Society, in conjunction with Boehringer Ingelheim and Pfizer Healthcare Ireland.

With a prevalence of 7.3%, it is estimated that about 325,000 people have COPD in Ireland; however the exact figure is unknown as COPD continues to be under diagnosed (1). Lack of awareness of the condition in Ireland is high, with previous research revealing that over three quarters (76%) of the Irish population do not know what COPD is (2). The disease, predominantly caused by smoking, causes the lungs' airways to become blocked, making it difficult for air to move in and out of the lungs and includes two major respiratory disorders - chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Symptoms include shortness of breath, cough, wheezing and increased phlegm. COPD mainly affects those over 40 years of age and although it is a major cause of death and disability throughout the world, it is a preventable disease and early diagnosis and treatment can greatly reduce the rate of deterioration. One simple and painless test to assist in the diagnosis of COPD is a spirometry test, a breathing test that is used to confirm the diagnosis. Anyone at risk of COPD should have spirometry as it can identify COPD in its early stages (3). Early intervention can slow down or prevent further deterioration of lung function.

Dr. Terry O'Connor, Respiratory Physician, Mercy University Hospital, Cork, and newly appointed president of the Irish Thoracic Society, commented; "COPD is an umbrella term for two diseases, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, which coexist in the lungs of patients with COPD. There is a lack of awareness about COPD, yet it is a chronic lung disease and a major cause of illness in Ireland. It can be extremely debilitating, with symptoms such as breathlessness restricting a patient's ability to perform even normal everyday activities such as climbing stairs. Detection, treatment and early intervention in patients with COPD can greatly improve a person's quality of life. I would urge any smoker or former smoker over 40 years who has difficulty breathing to go to their doctor and get assessed for COPD. COPD is a costly disease in terms of the financial burden it places on Ireland and it also places significant pressure on our health service with more hospital admissions occurring in the winter months. The great news is that, when properly diagnosed and treated, patients with COPD can expect a dramatic

improvement in symptoms such as breathlessness as well as the frequency of ‘flare-ups’ or exacerbations.”

As part of the activities for World COPD Day 2009 in Ireland, COPD information posters and leaflets are being distributed to GP surgeries and hospitals throughout Ireland. World COPD Day is an annual international event organised by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD) to improve awareness and care of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease around the world.

- Ends -

Editors Notes:

The following questions may indicate that you could have COPD.

1. Do you cough several times most days?
2. Do you bring up phlegm or mucus most days?
3. Do you get out of breath more easily than others your age?
4. Are you over 40 years old?
5. Are you a current smoker or an ex-smoker?

If you answered yes to three or more of these questions you should ask your doctor if you might have COPD.

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