

WORLD COPD DAY – What you need to know
16TH NOVEMBER 2005

This year in the United Kingdom alone, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) will have been responsible for premature death of 30,000 people. With devastating impact it progressively disables those affected by it, before finally killing them. It's an important disease not just for these reasons but also for the very real possibility that the number of confirmed diagnoses (900,000) is likely to be just the tip of the iceberg which could place actual prevalence at an astounding 2 million.

This disparity between diagnosed and actual prevalence exists because symptoms begin insidiously and are frequently ignored by patients until they begin to impact on their ability to carry out normal, every day activities. It is this slow progression of COPD which makes it so deadly. By the time of diagnosis, considerable and irreversible damage to the lungs has often already occurred. Understanding the risk factors, knowing the early signs and making early diagnosis is absolutely vital.

This year World COPD Day on November 16th clearly focussed on this theme:

COPD – Read the warning signs

The aim is to highlight the need for earlier diagnosis and management of COPD. Early diagnosis depends on

- **Increasing public and health professional awareness of the significance of slowly increasing breathlessness on exertion, frequent 'winter bronchitis' and chronic cough**
- **Prompt and easy access to accurate spirometry to detect the early signs of airflow obstruction – the hall mark of COPD.**

Education for Health is one of the organisations working to raise the profile of COPD. Early identification is a priority if the debilitating, disabling, life shortening and expensive consequences of severe COPD are to be avoided. Early diagnosis means earlier treatment and intensive support to stop smoking: smokers are at high risk of developing the disease and smoking cessation is the most important and beneficial intervention. Stopping smoking at the earliest possible stage will prevent disease progression. Education and training which develops this vital ability to make an early diagnosis and goes on to develop competencies to manage and support patients, and help them and not their disease to control their life, is available from Education for Health. More information is available at www.educationforhealth.org.uk or email Glynis Nicol at g.nicol@educationforhealth.org.uk

A different approach is being taken by The British Lung Foundation (BLF) who are undertaking several activities in support of World COPD Day. Spirometry will be available at 20 Superdrug stores so that high risk individuals (those over 35 years of age who have smoked the equivalent of 20 cigarettes a day for 20 years) can be tested. Leaflets and luminous wrist bands will also be available in all dispensing Superdrug stores. In addition the BLF is mailing all GP surgeries with a poster aimed at encouraging people with respiratory symptoms to attend for spirometry. More information from www.lunguk.org