Stand together to call for attention and action to improve lung health, worldwide

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Today, 1ˢᵗ August, is World Lung Cancer Day. While different days exist in recognition of major NCDs, there is no single World Day uniting the international community against the many different forms of chronic lung disease. Dean Schraufnagel, Executive Director of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies, examines the global burden of lung diseases and the need to come together one day each year to promote solutions for better health.

The urgency and means to act on the burden of disease and 40 million deaths annually from NCDs are gaining increased recognition and commitment globally. And yet, despite being one of the four major NCDs recognised by WHO, chronic respiratory diseases are typically the least acknowledged. The need to act on cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases is highlighted annually on their designated 'World Days' – but a '*World Lung Day*' has not been internationally marked to date. Perhaps this is because we take breathing for granted. Or perhaps the lung community has simply not been vocal enough. The 2017 Global Impact on Respiratory Diseases [1] made a resounding case for action and being more vocal:

Lung health, consider the numbers:

- More than 65 million people suffer chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and three million die each year, making it the third leading cause of death worldwide–and the numbers are increasing.
- About 334 million people suffer from asthma, the most common chronic disease of childhood, affecting 14% of children globally–and its prevalence in children is rising.
- For decades, acute lower respiratory tract infection has been among the top three causes of death and disability among both children and adults. It causes about four million deaths annually and is the leading cause of death among children under 5 (outside the neonatal period).
- In 2015, 10.4 million people developed tuberculosis – and 1.4 million people died from it.
- The most common lethal neoplasm in the world is lung cancer. It kills 1.6 million people each year–and the numbers are growing.

- More than 100 million people suffer from sleep-disordered breathing–a disorder that may affect 5 to 10% of adults in many settings.
- Millions live with pulmonary hypertension, which may affect 1% of persons over 65 years of age.
- More than 50 million people struggle with occupational lung diseases.
- At least two billion people are exposed to indoor toxic smoke; one billion inhale outdoor polluted air; and one billion are exposed to tobacco smoke.
- Four million people die prematurely from chronic respiratory disease.

Formidable - but preventable!

Fortunately, most respiratory diseases are preventable - *by improving the quality of the air*. Common sources of unhealthy air are tobacco smoke, indoor and outdoor air pollution, and air containing microbes, toxic particles, fumes, or allergens.

Reducing tobacco consumption, controlling unhealthy air especially in the workplace, and strengthening immunization programs are important first steps. Improving respiratory health also means strengthening health care systems, using established guidelines for health promotion and disease prevention, training medical personnel, research, and educating the populace.

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), a global professional membership association comprising societies representing every continent and country, calls for action to address the huge burden of respiratory diseases and asserts that alleviating the burden of lung disease should be a leading strategy of the Sustainable Development Goals. Research can answer many questions and help us understand how to keep people healthy. Policy measures developed from the research must be cost-effective and widely applicable. Increased funding to support respiratory research is needed.

World Lung Day and a pledge

FIRS calls on all governments, communities, health care practitioners, and individuals to promote effective preventive measures and reduce tobacco consumption through recognition of 25 September 2017 as the first ever annual World Lung Day.

> *"The respiratory societies of the world believe that everyone has the right to breathe clean air and we ask lawmakers to enact and enforce clean air standards in all countries."*

Join us, and sign the Charter for Lung Health [here](#) [2].

About the author:

Dean Schraufnagel MD, is the Executive Director of the [Forum of International Respiratory Societies](#) [3] (FIRS, [@lungfirst](#) [4]). and Professor, Pulmonary Medicine at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He has conducted basic and clinical research and has authored 184 works including editing 4 books. He has been extensively involved in education and training and has championed promoting global lung health especially for the underserved.

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[1] https://www.firsnet.org/images/publications/The_Global_Impact_of_Respiratory_Disease.pdf
[2] https://www.change.org/p/the-director-general-of-the-world-health-organization-sign-the-charter-for-lung-health?utm_source=embedded_petition_view
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