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2010: The Year of the Lung

As The Year of the Lung (YOL) comes to a close, it is appropriate to take stock of what we hoped to accomplish. For the person on the street, both entering and leaving the world seems to be a function of the lung by the “first” or the “last” breath. However, this beautiful pair of vital organs has not had its due credit in the public or the research arena. The grim statistics are well known: 9 million new cases of TB are reported each year, resulting in nearly 2 million deaths¹; pneumonia accounts for the deaths of 1.8 million,² and estimates indicate that 1 in every 250 deaths worldwide can be attributed to asthma, many of which could have been prevented with proper treatment.³ Tobacco is a “marketed malady” with 5 million deaths worldwide due to tobacco-related diseases.⁴ Lung cancer accounts for 1.3 million deaths worldwide.⁵ COPD is increasing and will soon become the third cause of death worldwide.⁶ Each year, influenza kills thousands. Although the world’s attention toward the lungs peaks during epidemics such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and 2009 influenza A(H1N1) infection, lung health generally has not been on the public or governmental radar screen. Pink ribbons support awareness for breast cancer, but few realize that in the United States lung cancer kills more than colon, breast, and prostate cancers combined. Despite these ominous statistics, in a recent *New York Times* health-care column featuring disease risk in different organs, the lungs were conspicuously missing.⁷

IT IS NOT JUST A HEALTH PROBLEM—IT IS AN ECONOMIC PROBLEM

It is important that these common health problems are recognized not just as health-care issues but also as financial problems affecting the productivity of those suffering from them. Lung disease accounts for 15% of disability-adjusted life-years in the world. This should draw the attention of global bodies such as the World Economic Forum, whose pronouncements beget health-care policies, public health programs, and research dollars. Although other diseases, such as diabetes and coronary artery disease, have

captured world attention, the diseases of the lung have not shared a similar status in the public eye. In the United States alone, lung disease costs \$15 billion annually.

HOW HAS THE YOL ADDRESSED THIS PROBLEM?

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS), composed of the American College of Chest Physicians (ACCP), American Thoracic Society (ATS), Asia Pacific Society of Respiriology (APSR), Asociación Latinoamericana de Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (IUATLD), and Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), declared the year 2010 the YOL. For the first time in history, all the prominent respiratory societies around the globe were engaged in a coordinated effort to focus attention on all aspects of lung disease. The objectives of the YOL were to: (1) promote global awareness of lung health issues and diseases, (2) increase funding for lung health research, (3) develop and implement tools to prevent lung disease and disability, (4) diagnose and treat lung disease early in the course of illness, (5) research new diagnostic tools and medicines to treat and cure lung disease, and (6) encourage programs that promote personal lung health.

WHAT HAVE WE DONE THUS FAR?

The effort began with a declaration that the global organizations were concerned about the lack of appropriate funding for lung disease, among other things, and hoped to eventually achieve policy changes that will be conducive to better lung health.⁸ Many partners joined in this effort. Public statements were issued on designated days to focus on lung diseases and raise awareness, such as Lung Cancer Day and COPD Day. For the first time, a World Spirometry Day was organized on October 14th 2010. Spirometry, the simple monitoring tool of lung function, is not used with regularity even in developed countries and is not readily available to those in the developing world. The journals of the FIRS organizations have carried articles highlighting the YOL, a signature campaign for the declaration has been an ongoing

project at all the meetings, and legislators have been educated on the problem in the United States and many other countries. Each organization has planned and executed many projects to celebrate the YOL. A Web site (<http://www.2010yearofthelung.org>) created to specifically communicate about this initiative has received nearly a half million interested visitors. The logo symbolizing the FIRS partnership, diversity and global involvement, is now a well-recognized symbol of lung health.

WHAT HAS THE ACCP DONE?

The theme of the ACCP during the YOL was *From Prevention to Intervention*. ACCP, as the world's largest professional organization caring for lung health, has taken a lead in spreading lung cancer awareness. We have designed programs to teach about COPD to primary care practitioners. The Ambassadors group of The Chest Foundation has intensified teaching school and college students about the hazards of tobacco in its many forms. The annual CHEST meeting in Vancouver, BC, Canada, hosted many sessions that highlighted the YOL. ACCP has many resources, such as lung cancer and thromboembolism guidelines, disseminated worldwide. By coordinating World Spirometry Day in North America with the ATS, we have been making the public aware of the importance of this testing.

WHAT CAN OTHERS DO?

Members of the profession charged with protecting lung health should take advantage of the many tools that The Chest Foundation and the ACCP provide to help deliver the best practice (available at www.chestnet.org). We encourage others to engage in community outreach by taking advantage of the antitobacco educational materials (Tobacco of health, *Evils of Tobacco*, and *AntE Tobacco*) and Lung LessonsSM (available at www.chestfoundation.org). Anyone can join the effort by helping to popularize the benefits of spirometry and educate communities and legislators about the importance of lung health through the available materials on the YOL and ACCP Web sites.

WHAT IS IN THE FUTURE?

The organizations of FIRS plan to solidify and extend the gains achieved by rallying around the YOL in 2010. Although some of the programs may evolve into annual events, additional projects and programs are planned to achieve the goals set forth at the beginning. FIRS organizations have banded together

and collaborated effectively in promoting lung health. This integrated effort should translate into more research dollars, governmental programs, and supportive policy decisions. The ACCP is both equipped and poised to be an active participant with its large and international membership around the world. Backed by the enthusiastic members, the leadership remains committed to keeping the candle burning for this important cause.

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