

### **Respiratory patients ask for equal access to smoking cessation programmes in Europe**

**Brussels, 29 May 2015, ahead of the WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY** – Tobacco is the key risk to develop respiratory and incurable conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), but public health policies aimed to help quitting smoking still provide limited support to patients in many European countries.

Tobacco kills 2 in 3 smokers (1). Smoking remains the most significant cause of premature death in the EU, and is responsible for almost 700,000 deaths every year. Lifelong smokers have a 50% probability of developing COPD during their lifetime, but this risk falls by half when they stop smoking (2). Access to appropriate counselling, medical support and treatment is key to help COPD patients quit smoking (3), yet access to smoking cessation programmes is unequal in Europe.

The European Federation of Allergies and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) has conducted a survey among 19 European countries to map the public authorities' responsible for policies impacting COPD patients, including smoking cessation programmes. The survey report "Harmonising prevention and other measures for COPD patients across Europe" (4) shows important inequalities among European countries regarding the existence of support programmes, counselling and reimbursement of therapies.

EFA President Christine Rolland said: "Nicotine is a highly-addictive substance. Patients willing to quit smoking need access to smoking cessation programmes. As patients' representatives, we call today on European health ministries to grant access to professional cessation support and free-of-charge treatments for all respiratory patients, especially those living with COPD, to reduce the burden tobacco poses on them".

Although European Union policies encourage Member States to adopt smoking cessation policies, the initiatives are under consideration (Germany, Ireland), target only the youth, do not reimburse -or partially reimburse- treatment (Finland, France, Italy, Norway), or do not provide support at all. It is the case of Bulgaria, where although the average rate of smoking-related deaths in 2008 was twice as high compared to the EU-15, the national smoking cessation programme did not foresee accompanying services, leaving patients without appropriate support to quit smoking.

EFA's report shows good smoking cessation practice in Austria, Poland, Serbia and Spain, where smoking cessation aid is free and holistic for patients with COPD. In the United Kingdom, COPD patients who smoke are referred to free specialist stop smoking services where they get the specific treatment and support they need.

Tobacco smoke will become the third leading cause of death worldwide by 2030 if no action is taken. EFA's report encourages to take stock of the successful smoking cessation measures that could be implemented in other countries in order to harmonise prevention and healthcare measures for COPD patients across Europe.

ENDS

#### **Notes to editors:**

- 1) National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University: <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1741-7015/13/38>
- 2) Laniado-Laborín L., Smoking and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Parallel Epidemics of the 21st Century, in International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 2009
- 3) WHO *Tobacco Fact Sheet* May 2014: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs339/en/>

- 4) EFA Survey Report 2014 *Harmonising prevention and other measures for COPD patients across Europe*:  
<http://www.efanet.org/images/2015/04/EFA-2014-SURVEY-%E2%80%93-Harmonizing-Prevention-and-other-Measures-for-COPD-Patients-across-Europe.pdf>

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*The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is a non-profit network of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) patients organisations, representing 40 national associations in 24 countries and over 400,000 patients. Visit [www.efanet.org](http://www.efanet.org) for more information.*