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Will Europe Suffocate or Breathe? EFA to Unite Partners to Launch the First European Call to Action on Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

On June 30th following the European Open Health Forum, EFA will hold an important event hosted by MEP Catherine Stihler, at the European Parliament in Brussels to mark the launch of a new European Call to Action on COPD.

COPD affects approximately 210 million people globally, 44 million in Europe, and is the fourth leading cause of mortality. The disabling disease, which causes gradual restriction of airflow and consequent difficulty in breathing, can greatly impact patients' social lives and ability to work.

The announcement of the EU Call to Action follows the successful launch of the "*EFA Book on COPD in Europe. Sharing and Caring*"¹ on World COPD Day 2009, which shed light on this "underdiagnosed, undertreated and neglected disease". According to the WHO, if COPD is not tackled appropriately it stands to become the third leading cause of death worldwide by 2030.

The book represents an unprecedented collection of data on the quality of care, disease management, social and financial burden of COPD in Europe and highlights serious shortfalls across many measures. All national patient associations surveyed reported that access to early diagnosis of COPD is 'difficult' or 'very difficult' in their countries. An alarming message, considering that an early and accurate diagnosis of COPD would allow for lifestyle changes and timely treatment that can prevent the progression of the disease. "This would not only save resources by enabling people with COPD to stay active citizens, but literally save lives" stresses Marianella Salapatas, president of EFA. The social impact of the disease is significant, creating a societal burden. Access to treatments, support services and rehabilitation in most countries are also reported to be sub-optimal. COPD weighs heavily on already stretched healthcare budgets, and often leads to work absenteeism and loss in productivity. For instance, COPD accounts for 67% of overall costs in France, and 50% in the Netherlands.

Despite these alarming facts, no common EU strategy has ever been adopted on respiratory diseases. EFA now aims to address this gap by uniting medical, political and patient communities to adopt a coordinated and comprehensive EU-wide strategy on COPD. In 2007 already, 226 MEPs signed a Written Declaration on COPD, led then by MEPs Catherine Stihler, Jerzy Buzek Paulo Casaca, Avril Doyle and Gérard Onesta, which called on the Member States to raise awareness on COPD, facilitate research, and implement smoke-free policies. This Call to Action takes a step further towards a common and integrated EU strategy on COPD.

¹ The book is available online: www.efanet.org/EFABookonCOPDinEUROPE.html



About EFA

The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA) is an alliance of 35 member organisations in 22 countries, founded in 1991. EFA is committed to improve the health and quality of care of patients with allergy, asthma and COPD and encourage patient participation through advocacy, capacity building and sharing best practices. EFA's priorities include indoor and outdoor air quality, greater access to and quality of medical and social care and prevention, patient centred research and meaningful patient participation in research, involvement in policies, commissioning of patient care services & society and having a voice in care delivery & society.

<http://www.efanet.org>

Acknowledgment

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The event is also part of the Year of the Lung 2010 initiative, organised by the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS).

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