



EMBARGOED: 11am CET, Monday, 5 March 2007

## **Largest survey ever on severe asthma highlights true impact and need for improved care across Europe**

Brussels, March 5, 2007 – A ground-breaking survey revealing the potentially catastrophic impact of severe asthma on the lives of people across Europe has been published in the latest issue of leading scientific journal, *Allergy*. According to the report, commissioned by The European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients Associations (EFA), 90% of the 6 million people in Europe with severe asthma are not receiving optimum care, leading 1.5 million of them to live in “constant fear” that their next attack could be fatal<sup>1</sup>.

The report, “The Limitations of Severe Asthma: the Results of a European Survey” exposes the devastating impact of the condition on the quality of life of patients and their families. Participants in the survey were asked what it means to live with the burden of severe asthma: results reveal that the symptoms of the condition not only limit patients’ lifestyles, with almost 70% unable to take part in physical activity, but mean that one in five also experience speech-limiting attacks at least once a week, leaving them unable to draw enough breath even to ask for help<sup>1</sup>.

“The shocking irony of these findings is that severe asthma can be successfully managed if asthma guidelines are followed effectively. Yet, according to this study, most people with severe asthma in Europe are failing to receive adequate standards of care that reach recommended international GINA (Global Initiative for Asthma) treatment targets,” comments Professor Martyn Partridge, study author and Chair of Respiratory Medicine at the National Heart and Lung Institute. For the majority of the millions of Europeans with severe asthma, these targets should be achievable but the report shows that as many as 90% are missing at least one of the five recommended treatment goals<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, patients who are inadequately treated are more likely to suffer frequent attacks and are at greater risk of hospitalisation and in some cases, death<sup>2,3</sup>.

As might be expected, the discovery that most people with severe asthma are not receiving satisfactory levels of care was accompanied by the finding that the majority of patients are not optimistic that their national healthcare systems will provide better levels of care in the future. When asked to choose one thing they hoped their government would do to improve asthma care, almost a third of respondents stated a wish for further investment in research and 14% hoped for a ban on smoking in public places<sup>1</sup>.

Recent legislative milestones are a positive sign that the European Parliament (EP) and member states are beginning to recognise the true socio-economic impact of the condition and the need for improvements in levels and consistency of care. Publication of “The Limitations of Severe Asthma” follows on the heels of the European Parliament’s vote on the EU Seventh Research Framework Programme (FP7), which makes respiratory diseases and allergies a research priority until 2013<sup>4</sup>. In addition, following input from EFA and other key stakeholders, the European Commission published a Green Paper in January, which detailed the dangers of second-hand smoke and called for further consultation and debate on the best way to tackle second hand smoke across the EU.

Despite these positive steps, the survey exposes the shortfalls that clearly persist in the management of severe asthma throughout Europe and the fact that a great deal more needs to be done to ensure consistency in the standard of care. Asthma affects 30 million people across the continent<sup>5</sup> and costs healthcare services approximately €17.7 billion a year<sup>6</sup> – a cost which could be significantly reduced if access to effective patient-centred care was a rule not a privilege across Europe. In Western Europe one person dies every hour as a result of severe asthma<sup>7</sup>, but 90% of these deaths could be prevented with effective management of the disease<sup>8</sup>.

“We must continue to increase public awareness, improve patient education and provide better access to appropriate healthcare for all people with asthma to ensure that a consistent level of care is provided for all and to prevent needless deaths. EFA’s collaborative work sets out an achievable vision of control over asthma, through the delivery of excellent care, investment into research and implementation of policies that reflect the right to breathe clean air. This vision must now be backed up by positive government action across Europe,” says Donna Covey, Chief Executive of Asthma UK.

“It is the right of every person with asthma across the continent to expect high-quality care that truly meets their needs. Asthma UK’s Asthma Charter was developed exactly for this purpose and aims to help patients in the UK, as well as healthcare professionals, recognise the high-quality treatment and support that they are entitled to receive.”

“We are delighted by the European Union initiatives to prioritise respiratory research and by the steps taken towards enforcing people’s legitimate right to breathe healthy air indoors”, says EFA Vice President, Marianella Salapatas. “Nevertheless, the results of “The Limitations of Severe Asthma” confirm that levels of asthma care and control across Europe are not improving on the whole.

“Asthma continues to be a serious concern, but this report is a significant breakthrough for communicating the true impact of severe asthma and EFA is dedicated to doing more to tackle the issue. We will continue to advocate and collaborate for strict European standards for outdoor air quality and for a comprehensive European programme on indoor air quality, including smokeless workplaces and other public places. We will also call for targeted research efforts, and above all, patient-centred care for our patients so that they can take control of their asthma rather than letting asthma control their lives.”

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*For further information please contact:*

Susanna Palkonen, EFA Executive Officer  
[susanna.palkonen@efanet.org](mailto:susanna.palkonen@efanet.org)  
Tel: +32 (0)2 2272712

Isabel Ward, Chandler Chicco Agency  
[i.ward@cca-uk.com](mailto:i.ward@cca-uk.com)  
Tel: +44 207 632 1833

## **Notes for Editors**

### “The Limitations of Severe Asthma: the results of a European survey”

The study involved 1,300 people with severe asthma in five European countries: France, Spain, Germany, Sweden and the UK and was conducted by NOP healthcare and coordinated by Asthma UK on behalf of EFA.

The study was supported by an educational grant from Novartis.

## **EU Policy and Legislation**

In November 2006, the EP voted on the FP7 and agreed to prioritise research in respiratory disease and allergies, providing hope to the 1.5 million asthma patients for whom there are still not enough effective treatment options to control their symptoms. The new programme came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 and will see €6 billion invested in transnational health research projects, which will include research into respiratory health. Additional opportunities for improvement may come from money invested in researching environmental stressors for human health, such as urban and indoor air pollutants. In line with this, landmark steps are already being taken by the European Commission to address the issue of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), one of the key exacerbants of severe asthma. Following preliminary consultation with EFA and other key stakeholders, the Commission published a Green Paper entitled “Towards a Europe free from tobacco smoke: policy options at EU level”, detailing the dangers of ETS and its association with respiratory disease.

For further information about the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework please visit:

[http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/home\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/home_en.html)

For further information on the EC Green Paper on tobacco smoke see:

[http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph\\_determinants/life\\_style/Tobacco/Documents/gp\\_smoke\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_determinants/life_style/Tobacco/Documents/gp_smoke_en.pdf)

## **EFA**

European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations (EFA)

[www.efanet.org](http://www.efanet.org)

35 Rue du Congrès, 1060 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: +32 (0)2 227 2712. Fax: +32 (0)2 218 3141.

Email: [susanna.palkonen@efanet.org](mailto:susanna.palkonen@efanet.org) .

The EFA is a nonprofit network of allergy, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patient organisations who represents its 33 members on European level and provides a platform for members to exchange experiences and for capacity building. Our aim is to reduce the frequency and severity of allergies, asthma and COPD, minimise their societal implications, improve the healthrelated quality of life and ensure full citizenship of people with these conditions, as well as pursuing equal health opportunities in the field of allergy and airways in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Dockrell M, Partridge MR, Valovirta E. The limitations of severe asthma: the results of a European survey. *Allergy* 2007;62:134-141.

<sup>2</sup> Tough SC, Hessel PA, Ruff M, Green FH, Mitchell I, Butt JC. Features that distinguish those who die from asthma from community controls with asthma. *J Asthma* 1998;35:657-665.

<sup>3</sup> Turner MO, Noertjojo K, Vedal S, Bai T, Crump S, Fitzgerald JM. Risk factors for near-fatal asthma. A case-control study in hospitalized patients with asthma. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 1998;157:1804-1809.

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/home\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/home_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> GINA Global Initiative for Asthma. The Global Burden of Asthma Report, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> The European Lung White Book: The First Comprehensive Survey on Respiratory Health in Europe 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Rabe KF, Vermeire PA, Soriano JB, et al. Clinical management of asthma in 1999: the Asthma Insights and Reality in Europe (AIRE) study. *Eur Respir J* 2000;16:802-7.

<sup>8</sup> [www.asthma.org.uk/all\\_about\\_asthma/publications/asthma\\_at\\_work.html](http://www.asthma.org.uk/all_about_asthma/publications/asthma_at_work.html)