

Media release

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma caused 3.6 million deaths worldwide in 2015

The latest estimates from the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study estimate that there were 3.6 million deaths from the two most common chronic respiratory diseases in 2015. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) accounts for most of the deaths (3.2 million), but asthma accounts for a much greater share of the disease burden, particularly in children.

The causes of COPD are well-known, with most cases being due to smoking or outdoor air pollution, as well as indoor air pollution, occupational exposures, ozone and second-hand smoke.

On the other hand, the causes of asthma are still largely unknown, despite the fact that asthma represents a large public health burden, and prevalence is increasing as the world becomes more affluent and westernized.

"We know what to do about COPD, what causes it and how to prevent it. However, we still know very little about the causes of asthma, and why it is increasing worldwide" says Professor Neil Pearce from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Professor Pearce is leading Phase I of the Global Asthma Network (GAN) <http://www.globalasthmanetwork.org/> which is now launching its first global surveillance of asthma prevalence and management, which already involves centres in 49 countries, with a further 85 countries interested. Over 50% of countries in GAN which are low- and middle-income countries.

The number of people with asthma has increased in low- and middle-income countries over the last two decades. Although the causes of asthma are yet not known (although many potential causal factors have been identified), the reasons for the increased incidence are not at present, well understood.

Says Professor Asher (University of Auckland), Chair of GAN: "*GAN, with its collaborating centres around the world, is a way to contribute to greater understanding of this disease and its evolving prevalence. The tools to treat*

asthma are already available, and the obstacles to well-managed asthma can be overcome”, says Professor Asher. Despite these facts, many of the millions of people with asthma go undiagnosed or receive poor or inadequate treatment – a situation that leads to diminished quality of life, disability and even death – in the world about 1000 people die from asthma each day. “To overcome this situation we need better information on the current situation globally with regards to the prevalence and burden of asthma, and current management practices. This is a prerequisite to developing better asthma prevention and control”.

GAN represents a continuation of the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC) <http://isaac.auckland.ac.nz/>. Over a 22-year period, before the formation of GAN, ISAAC was the largest epidemiological study of children in the world, (Guinness World Records 2004) with more than two million children studied over 22 years in nearly 300 centres in 105 countries. ISAAC supplied the original asthma prevalence estimates for the Global Burden of Disease study 2010. Further GBD analyses have been updated in their new report published today. Although ISAAC, in 2012 formally came to an end, this work is now being continued by GAN, but with a wider agenda for the prevention and control of asthma globally. GAN will measure and monitor asthma prevalence and severity, and asthma management, in children and adults, will promote guidelines on asthma management, will build capacities in research and management; and will enhance the availability and affordability of essential asthma medicines. GAN will also serve as an important resource for health services, policy-makers, patients and organisations working on asthma and will enable local experience to be shared globally. A world without asthma is the ultimate vision.

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Global Asthma Network www.globalasthmanetwork.org

The Global Asthma Report 2011 (published by ISAAC and The Union)

www.globalasthmareport.org Asthma Drug Facility www.globaladf.org