

7 May 2013

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

Access to medicines is key to reducing suffering from asthma

Asthma causes disabling symptoms in millions of people who struggle to breathe, making ordinary activities extraordinarily difficult – things like going to school, working at a job, looking after children or aging parents, running or even walking. About 235 million people in the world suffer from asthma and the number is increasing – asthma is a neglected epidemic.

There are high costs of poorly controlled asthma. *“The costs of acute treatment at the doctor or hospital, the lost productivity of people with asthma or parents of children with asthma, the lost education of children who are too unwell to attend school, all amount to billions of dollars lost to society.”* says Professor Innes Asher, Chair of the Global Asthma Network (GAN) Steering Group.

Good asthma management can change all this. Appropriate management includes people with asthma knowing the steps to take to prevent their asthma symptoms and to treat worsening asthma (self management plans). They also need to be able to access effective health care management when it is needed.

Underpinning asthma treatment is ready access to quality-assured essential asthma medicines (a reliever such as salbutamol and a preventer inhaled corticosteroid such as beclometasone). But many countries in the world do not have these medicines readily available. Even where these medicines are available their cost may be beyond the reach of many of the asthma sufferers.

It is vital that governments continue to develop coherent policies to enhance access to effective asthma medicines. Professor Asher expresses concern that *“New international agreements being developed behind closed doors such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement potentially put at risk the ability of governments to negotiate lower prices for quality-assured medicines.”*

Health leaders must strive to put quality-assured essential asthma medicines on the WHO pre-qualification list by next year, have them on all national essential medicines lists by 2015, and within 5 years have these medicines available and affordable in all countries.

GAN, established in 2012, is working worldwide to reduce the burden of asthma through improving management, research, surveillance, capacity building and GAN strives to achieve global access to quality-assured essential medications.

Contact

Professor Innes Asher i.asher@auckland.ac.nz mobile 64 9 21492262
Further information www.globalasthmanetwork.org

STEERING GROUP

Prof Innes Asher, Chair*
Auckland, New Zealand

Dr Nils E. Billo, Co-Chair*
Paris, France

Dr Karen Bissell*
Auckland, New Zealand

Dr Chiang Chen-Yuan
Taipei, Taiwan

Dr Asma El Sony
Khartoum, Sudan

Mrs Philippa Ellwood*
Auckland, New Zealand

Prof Luis García-Marcos
Murcia, Spain

Prof Javier Mallol
Santiago, Chile

Prof Guy Marks
Sydney, Australia

Prof Neil Pearce
London, United Kingdom

Prof David Strachan
London, United Kingdom

(* Executive Group)