

6 May 2014

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

Medicines needed for all people with asthma

Asthma causes disabling symptoms in millions of people who struggle to breathe, making ordinary activities extraordinarily difficult – such as going to school, working at a job, looking after children or aging parents, running or even walking. More than 334 million people in the world suffer from asthma and the number is increasing – asthma is the world's neglected epidemic.

There are high costs of poorly controlled asthma such as the costs of acute treatment at the doctor or hospital, lost productivity of people with asthma or parents of children with asthma and lost education of children who are too unwell to attend school. All these things amount to billions of dollars lost to society.

Good asthma management can change all this, if the people who need them can readily access 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, especially the poorer countries. Even where these medicines are available their cost may be beyond the reach of many asthma sufferers.

Governments and health leaders must ensure that essential asthma medicines are on the WHO pre-qualification list by this year, have them on all national essential medicines lists by 2015, and within 5 years have these medicines available and affordable in all countries.

The Global Asthma Network (www.globalasthmanetwork.org) is working worldwide to reduce the burden of asthma through improving management, research, surveillance and capacity building as well as global access to quality-assured essential asthma medicines.

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