

66 million people may live with COPD in Europe, yet it remains unknown

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Research finds that as many as 66 million people in European region may be living with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease – yet, very few people have ever heard of this disease.

On the occasion of World COPD Day, on 16 November 2016, the European COPD Coalition is encouraging anyone who gets out of breath doing everyday tasks, to take their lung health seriously, not to ignore symptoms and consult a doctor, in case of doubt.

ECC is also calling on governments and the EU to set up a strategy to address COPD in a comprehensive manner, and in particular, to support awareness raising campaigns.

“COPD is a very serious chronic lung disease, the umbrella name for emphysema and chronic bronchitis. COPD stands for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and is characterised by the production of a large amount of mucus (or phlegm), wheezing, fatigue and breathlessness. It is mainly caused by smoking, but being exposed to dust, fumes or poor air quality, and a rare form of gene deficiency may also be the reason for COPD. It is more common than diabetes, HIV/AIDS or tuberculosis, but very few people know about it”, said Catherine Hartmann, Secretary General of ECC, the European COPD Coalition. “With such a high number of people concerned, it is puzzling that COPD remains so invisible to the public at large, decision makers, and the general media” she added.

259,000 people die of COPD each year in the EU, but most people living with COPD have not been diagnosed, or may die of a co-morbidity. That is just the “tip of the iceberg” according to Monica Fletcher, Member of ECC and Chair of the European Respiratory Nurses Association (ERNA).

“A lot of people ignore their symptoms and healthcare professionals may not ask the right questions – this delays the diagnosis. Many people live with insufficient breathing capacity to just perform daily activities such as taking a shower, doing the food shopping or the gardening. Studies have also shown that people cannot continue to work and are forced to retire early, which has a huge financial and emotional impact on individuals and their families. COPD is not curable and treatments target the symptoms to enhance the quality of life but COPD is irreversible”, Fletcher explained.

For more information, visit the European COPD Coalition website via the link below.

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