World No Tobacco Day 2019: Respiratory groups call for stronger implementation of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

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On World No Tobacco Day, 31 May 2019, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) calls for renewed efforts to strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in all countries, in order to work towards achieving the United Nations (UN) Global Goals for Sustainable Development [1] to ensure a healthy life and promote well-being for all, at all ages.

Tobacco contributes to millions of deaths globally each year, and smoking tobacco cigarettes is the main cause of many lung diseases. Approximately half of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) deaths and eight out of ten cases of lung cancer are attributable to current and past smoking, tobacco also fuels the global epidemic of tuberculosis.

Professor Tobias Welte, current president of both FIRS and the European Respiratory Society (ERS), explains: “Tobacco smoking is without doubt the single most important risk factor for respiratory disease. We know what is effective in reducing the rates of tobacco smoking: high prices on tobacco; legislation to protect children and adults from second-hand exposure; strict marketing bans; regulation of tobacco products, packaging and point-of-sale displays; raising public awareness; and limiting interactions between public officials and the tobacco industry.

“But to further encourage all current smokers to quit so that we can reduce morbidity and mortality from smoking over the next two decades and beyond, these tactics must be combined with effective and free smoking cessation services, which ideally includes professional counselling and free or subsidised smoking cessation medication.”

The WHO says the speed of action to decrease tobacco demand [and consequent death and disease] is failing to keep up with global and national commitments to reduce the proportion of people that smoke tobacco by 30 percent by 2025, and warns that if current rates continue, the world will only achieve a 22 percent reduction by 2025.

To work towards the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development for further implementation of the WHO FCTC, FIRS calls for stronger efforts to:

- Increase taxes and prices on tobacco products
- Implement plain/standardised packaging and/or large graphic health warnings on all tobacco packages
- Improve public access to free smoking cessation services
- Enact and enforce comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Eliminate exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke in all indoor workplaces and public places, and on public transport
- Implement effective mass media campaigns that educate the public about the harms of smoking/tobacco use and second-hand smoke

Tackling tobacco is key to reducing morbidity and mortality from lung disease across the world, which is why we must continue combining our efforts to maintain pressure upon policymakers, to educate the public, and to encourage and support smokers to quit.

Notes

[1] The specific UN Sustainable Development Goals (source: https://bit.ly/2ZLBeYG):

- Target 3.A: to strengthen the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)
- Target 3.4: to reduce premature NCD mortality
- Global NCD target: a 30 percent relative reduction in prevalence of current tobacco use in persons aged 15+ years by 2025.

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Disease burden statistics were sourced via:

- ERS White Book: Tobacco Smoking https://bit.ly/2Db3Bpz
- ERS 10 Principles for Lung Health https://bit.ly/2UdY86Q
- WHO Tobacco and Lung Health factsheet – https://bit.ly/2VJd5yL

About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS)

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is an organisation comprised of the world's leading international respiratory societies working together to improve lung health globally: American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

The goal of FIRS is to unify and enhance efforts to improve lung health through the combined work of its more than 70,000 members globally.

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