Pulmonary Diseases
First Cause of Mortality in the World

To the Editor:

We read with interest the recent editorial on the “Year of the Lung” published in CHEST (December 2010). On its Web site, the World Health Organization lists the top 10 causes of mortality in the world as:

- Coronary heart disease (12.2%)
- Stroke and other cerebrovascular diseases (9.7%)
- Lower respiratory infections (7.1%)
- COPD (5.1%)
- Diarrheal diseases (3.7%)
- HIV/AIDS (3.5%)
- TB (2.5%)
- Trachea, bronchial tube, lung cancers (2.3%)
- Road traffic accidents (2.2%)
- Prematurity and low birth weight (2.0%)

For decades, these kinds of reports have suggested that cardiac and infectious illnesses are the main causes of death in the developed and developing world, respectively. If respiratory illnesses, including pneumonia, TB, and cancer in the respiratory system, among others, were grouped separately, the sum would reach 17% of all deaths and would be the top cause of death in the world.

The Year of the Lung, 2010, was proposed by several associations to raise awareness of and promote research into respiratory pathology after the 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic. Perhaps it is necessary to call not for a year, but for a decade of study on the respiratory system, which is involved in so much morbidity and mortality. Future accounts and developments in public health policies should take this view into account.

Affiliations: From the Critical Care Unit (Drs Sandoval-Gutierrez and Bautista Bautista) and the Department of Immunology (Dr Sevilla Reyes), Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias.

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Correspondence to: Jose Luis Sandoval-Gutierrez, Critical Care Unit, Instituto Nacional de Enfermedades Respiratorias, Telef 4502, Mexico City, Mexico; e-mail: sandovalgutierrez@gmail.com

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REFERENCES

Response

To the Editor:

We appreciate the thoughtful comments and the suggestion to pool all respiratory diseases as a group made by Dr Sandoval-Gutierrez and colleagues in response to our editorial. The statistics quoted in their letter are precisely the reason that the Forum of International Respiratory Societies took up celebrating the “Year of the Lung.”

Proponents of the “Decade of the Lung” argue that it takes more than a year to bring respiratory health issues to the forefront for a meaningful impact on public and private stakeholders. We could not agree more.

On the other hand, a yearlong set of structured, high-profile, and intensive activities by the leading world respiratory organizations runs the risk of “tachyphylaxis” if extended to a decade. Rather, sustained and targeted efforts to focus attention on lung disease without necessarily using the eponym “Decade of the Lung” can support the accomplishments of the Year of the Lung in a sustainable manner.

Kalpalatha K. Guntupalli, MD, FCCP, Immediate Past President, ACCP, 2010-2011
Houston, TX
David Gutterman, MD, FCCP, President, ACCP, 2010-2011
Milwaukee, WI
Suhail Raof, MD, FCCP, President-Elect, ACCP, 2010-2011
Brooklyn, NY
Paul A. Markowski, CAE, Executive Vice President/Chief Executive Office, ACCP
Northbrook, IL

Affiliations: From the Baylor College of Medicine (Dr Guntupalli), the Medical College of Wisconsin (Dr Gutterman), and the New York Methodist Hospital (Dr Raof).

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Correspondence to: Suhail Raof, MD, FCCP, New York Methodist, Medicine-Pulmonary Critical Care, 2178 Kirby Ln, Muttontown, NY 11791; e-mail: sur9016@nyp.org

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