



Toowoomba Experts and The Australian Lung Foundation calling on locals to be more cautious of their lung health

–Toowoomba to spearhead a new advertising campaign to raise awareness of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease –

22 August, 2007...Toowoomba clinicians and the Australian Lung Foundation urged people today to pay more attention to the health of their lungs, as over 4,000* Toowoomba residents may unknowingly suffer from the long term lung condition known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, or COPD.

COPD, a long term disease of the lungs that includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema, is Australia's fifth¹ biggest killer and third² leading cause of disease burden after heart disease and stroke. Initially manifesting as breathlessness, which many mistake as signs of asthma or ageing, it is estimated that 1 in 6 Australians over 45³ – approximately 5,600 Toowoomba residents[†] – suffer from this chronic condition.

Of those afflicted, three out of four may not even know they have it⁴ – equating to over 4,000[†] Toowoomba residents. Perhaps more disturbing is that regular smokers, who are more likely to develop COPD, are even less likely to be aware of the condition.⁴

To raise awareness of COPD, The Australian Lung Foundation is launching a six-week advertising campaign in the Toowoomba area to improve diagnosis and encourage treatment.

Using TV, radio, print media and posters The Australian Lung Foundation hopes to get Toowoomba residents thinking about their lung health – and encourage people over 45 to see their GP about a simple lung function test if they have two or more of the following:

- Shortness of breath on minimal exertion
- A repetitive cough with phlegm or mucus most days
- Smoker or are an ex-smoker

Dr Ross Sellars, a Respiratory Physician at Toowoomba Hospital, today highlighted the importance of early COPD diagnosis.

* Toowoomba prevalence figures calculated using ABS 45+ population data and research showing three in four COPD sufferers are unaware they have the condition⁴.

† Toowoomba prevalence figures calculated using ABS 45+ population data and research showing up to one in six³ Australians aged 45 or over has the condition.



“Without proper care and maintenance, COPD can be extremely debilitating. People with moderate COPD are already starting to adjust their lifestyle to accommodate their breathlessness. At the severe stage COPD can mean that everyday activities, such as showering, tying shoelaces or walking to the kitchen to make a cup of tea become impossible.

However, if detected early, COPD can be managed and with appropriate treatment, people can stem the progress of the disease and significantly improve their quality of life,” said Dr Sellars.

Lyle Merker is one such example. A 53 year old fertilizer distributor and father of five from Warra, Mr Merker was diagnosed with COPD in 1998. He quit smoking and underwent lung reduction surgery the same year.

“I went to the hospital for tests, and I was in such a bad state, my doctor discussed putting me on the lung transplant list. I enrolled in pulmonary rehabilitation, and in ten weeks, my breathing and exercise tolerance had improved. Although I will eventually need surgery, I have so far kept myself off of the transplant list through proper maintenance,” said Mr Merker.

“It is important for people to be aware that while there is no cure for COPD, it is easier to manage if detected early. Breathlessness is not normal – speak with your doctor about a lung function test if you suffer shortness of breath. Don’t leave it until it’s too late,” said Heather Allan, Executive Director of the Australian Lung Foundation’s National COPD Program.

For further information on COPD and ways to best manage the condition, please call The Australian Lung Foundation’s toll free number 1800 818 545 or visit the website at www.lungnet.com.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

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References

¹ AIHW, Chronic Disease Mortality, http://www.aihw.gov.au/cdarf/data_pages/mortality/index.cfm

² Mathers C, Vos T, Stephenson C. 1999 *The Burden of Disease and Injury in Australia*. ISBN 1-74024-019-7. AIHW Cat. No. PHE-17

³ Abramson MJ. Respiratory symptoms and lung function in older people with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. *MJA* 4 July 2005; **183**(1):S23-S25

⁴ Pfizer Australia/Australian Lung Foundation Health Report, March 2006. The findings on Australian perceptions of COPD are based on responses from 1,354 Australians aged 18 and over. The research was conducted in August 2005 by independent consultants, Stollznow Research

⁵ ABS Regional Profile: Toowoomba. Census Data 2006.