Never too early, never too late – a new World Asthma Day

Niciodată prea devreme, niciodată prea târziu – Ziua Mondială a Astmului

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The Romanian Society of Pneumology (SRP) organized a press conference on World Asthma Day in the preamble of some activities dedicated to this anniversary, which included spirometry screenings, spirometry tests for the journalists, talkshows, TV or radio shows. This year marks the 8th year in a row edition of this event.

“Never too early, never too late – any moment is appropriate for dealing with respiratory disease” is the slogan that marked the campaign name in Romania for 2018. World Asthma Day is actually an annual project organized by the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) with the aim of educating the public. During the 12-13th of May weekend, free spirometry tests were offered in a special tent set up in the Tineretului Park of Bucharest. Of the 347 people tested on this occasion, 46 of them were identified with lung problems. The communication has generated 88 appearances in media channels that output an audience of 48,654,624 comments. All this action proved once again that the approach of this disease is and remains a topic of interest for our country.

The press conference covered topics such as the symptoms of the disease, the value of spirometry tests, and the experience gained over time by Romanian Society of Pneumology by organizing these spirometry screenings.

Symptoms have been discussed with the SRP president, prof. Ruxandra Ulmeanu, who showed that this disease affects nearly a million Romanian people, with signs such as cough, wheezing, and paroxysmal nocturnal dyspnea (PND). Among the mentioned risk factors, the most important ones were: respiratory allergies, food allergies, infections, workplace exposure, pollution etc. Although there is still no national survey available, the estimated prevalence of asthma in Romania is at a level of 6%. Regarding pollution, the Romanian Society of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (SRAIC), together with the Romanian Society of Pneumology (SRP), launched an awareness campaign on the air quality we are breathing and the effects of polluted air on the health of the Romanian people. This campaign preceded this conference and took place between April 16 and May 6, 2018, marking at the same time the World Allergy Week (April 22-28, 2018).

Indoor and outdoor allergies were also covered in the discussions, reminding us of house dust and pollen, mites and other particles present both in and out of the house. The disease burden worldwide was also approached, studies showing that:

- 20% of the world’s population suffers from allergic asthma or allergic rhinitis;
- 40% of the world’s population will be prone to allergies by 2040;
- 300 million people suffer from asthma and their number is expected to rise to 400 million in 2025;
- in more than 50% of adults and 80% of children, asthma was found to be caused by allergies.

Spirometry testing, as a routine investigation, was detailed by the associate professor Roxana Nemeș, who demonstrated the ease of its execution, the diagnostic and predictive value of evolution under treatment, and also its importance in monitoring the disease in both adults and children. A presentation of the results from the last asthma spirometry screening in 2017 followed. Of the 216 subjects tested and questioned, 22% obstructive dysfunctions were identified, although 38% of those examined were complaining of dyspnoea as their first symptom. Of the latter, 20% were already diagnosed with asthma. At the end of the press conference, a patient with a form of severe asthma talked about how he managed to control the disease and what steps had he taken to achieve a better quality of life with an optimized therapy. A movie aimed to raise awareness about pollution and the need for educating the population on how to avoid exposure to this new risk factor has been projected.

This action has joined other initiatives in the education projects that SRP has initiated over time with the aim to speed up the communication process between patients, doctors and authorities, and to improve the identification and control of a chronic condition known to be underdiagnosed, underestimated and poorly monitored.