

Alarming rate of COPD in SA

Urgent research is needed to understand the massive potential burden of non-tobacco-related chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in Cape Town and South Africa (SA), both of which have among the world's worst COPD burdens, Prof. Richard van Zyl, Associate Professor and Head of the Lung Clinical Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, said last month.

Van Zyl was responding on 6 June to the global Burden of Lung Disease (BOLD) 2007 findings debated at the May 2016 Cipla Respiratory Congress in Cape Town. These showed Ravensmead in Cape Town to have the highest prevalence of COPD among 47 towns and cities globally (19%),

and SA the highest incidence of COPD among 24 countries surveyed. He cautioned against extrapolating the Ravensmead findings (the only suburb surveyed in Cape Town) to the entire metro, saying that the prevalence in the Cape Town areas and nationally was probably between 10% and 15% – still among the world's worst. He stressed that the global study examined only smokers.

Greater Cape Town has some of the highest tuberculosis (TB) rates in the country, while the prevalence of cigarette smoking among coloured people (who comprise the majority of the city's population) stands at a record 40.1%, with 34.4% of these being women (five times the rate for all SA

women), according to Stats SA. SA has one of the most serious global TB epidemics. Van Zyl said there was a glaring absence of COPD data on dagga, biomass fuel indoor pollution, post-TB obstructive lung disease, HIV and early childhood and intrauterine issues that impaired lung development. 'We have a confluence of all these in SA, so healthcare workers must look out for other potential causes besides tobacco,' he warned.

Chris Bateman
chrisb@hmpg.co.za

S Afr Med J 2016;106(7):654.
DOI:10.7196/SAMJ.2016.v106i7.11147