

Chronic respiratory diseases are neglected

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Guest Editor

Respiratory disorders are the top three principal causes of hospitalization and death in Malaysia.¹ The prevalence of asthma in children and adults are estimated at 8.9% to 13%²⁻³ and 6.3% respectively⁴ while prevalence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) are estimated at 3.4-6.5% depending on definitions used.⁵⁻⁶

Despite the associated morbidity and mortality, management of asthma and COPD remains poor. Patients with asthma were poorly educated on the disease, asthma control and self management was poor and follow up care was inadequate.^{2,7} There was under-utilisation of inhaled controller medications and overuse of oral short-acting beta 2-agonist; use of peak flow meter for monitoring of asthma was poor.^{2,8} Similarly, for COPD, there was poor disease awareness and COPD was often mislabeled as asthma by both health care workers and patients.⁹ The palliative needs of COPD are frequently unmet.¹⁰ Research has been lacking in chronic respiratory diseases in Malaysia, in particular primary care settings where the majority of patients are seen.

We need to make a concerted effort to diagnose and manage chronic respiratory diseases better. The 2018 publications of GINA and GOLD guideline on asthma and COPD diagnosis, management and prevention, and the Malaysian Clinical Practice Guidelines on management of asthma in adult, a summary of which is published in this issue, will aid health care professionals to better manage these conditions.¹¹⁻¹³ In addition, more respiratory research is needed globally to address research gaps and the unmet needs for respiratory diseases. The NIHR Global Health Research Unit on Respiratory Health (RESPIRE) is a research partnership between the University of Edinburgh and collaborators from four Asian countries – Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and Pakistan, funded by the NHS National Institute for Health Research, UK. The aim is to reduce respiratory morbidity and mortality in Asia through research, which is a step forward to bridge this knowledge gap.

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