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Title: High prevalence of COPD symptoms in the Tunisian population contrasting with low awareness of the disease

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Body: Introduction: In Tunisia, the estimated prevalence of COPD was low compared with America and Europe and the disease is certainly under diagnosed. We have estimated the prevalence of COPD in the city of Sousse, following the BOLD protocol. Methods: We surveyed a representative random sample of 807 adults aged 40 years+ selected from the general population and have collected information on respiratory history and symptoms, risk factors for COPD and health status. Post-bronchodilator spirometry was performed for assessment of COPD. COPD and its stages were defined according to GOLD guidelines. Population weighted prevalence of COPD were computed allowing for survey design. Results: 661 subjects were included in the final analysis. The response rate was 90%. The estimated population prevalence of GOLD Stage 1 and stage 2 or higher COPD were 7.8% and 4.2%, respectively (LLN modified stage 1 and stage 2 or higher COPD prevalence were 5.3% and 3.8%, respectively). COPD was far more common in men, increased with age and exposure to tobacco smoke. Prevalence of stage 1+ COPD was 2.3% in <10 pack years smoked and 16.1% in 20+ pack years smoked. Only 3.5% of participants reported doctor-diagnosed COPD. Conclusions: In this Tunisian population, the prevalence of COPD is higher than reported before and higher than self-reported doctor-diagnosed COPD. The implications for disease

diagnosis and management in clinical practices might have a public health impact. In subjects with COPD, age seems to be a much more powerful predictor of lung function than smoking. LLN _ Lower Limit of Normal; BOLD _ Burden of Lung Disease; GOLD _ Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease.