

Preface

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The publication in 1983 within the framework of the third medical research programme, set up under the Treaty establishing the European Steel and Coal Community, of a document entitled "Standardized Lung Function Testing" represented a major event in the field of the prevention of respiratory diseases.

Since 1983, the recommendations contained in that report have been widely adopted by investigators. This has ensured through a harmonized and standardized approach to respiratory function tests, a substantial level of comparability between different epidemiological studies. Using these standardized methods and procedures it has been possible to delineate the normal range of values in a healthy population, and applying these methods to subjects affected by lung disease has allowed assessment of the predictive value of positive and negative findings.

During the subsequent Fourth and Fifth Programmes the earlier work was extended to other indices of potential interest for on-site testing, and has now placed at our

disposal a number of tests which are both suitable and useful for testing workers at the workplace.

This 1993 report includes updated recommendations on harmonization of tests and procedures concerned with lung volumes, forced ventilatory flows and transfer factor; a new chapter is devoted to the very substantial topic of airway responsiveness. It is anticipated that this text will provide essential basic information required at the workplace by the medical services responsible for the surveillance of the ventilatory function of workers at risk of developing respiratory disease due to exposure to harmful substances released in their working environment.

A very practical chapter is devoted, as in the previous report, to the list of abbreviations commonly used in this field. These tables which now cover all languages spoken in the Member States will undoubtedly help researchers and practitioners to reach a common basis of understanding.

It is hoped that all those who use respiratory function tests in the European Community, but also worldwide, will find this report of value bearing in mind that harmonization is not a goal in itself, but a tool for the improvement of the quality of research activities, and ultimately for improving the quality of life in the work environment.

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