National Survey Reveals Americans Lack Understanding About Lung Cancer Testing Options

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Lung Cancer Alliance Calls for Funding for Early Testing Program

WASHINGTON, March 28 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- A new national survey released by the Lung Cancer Alliance reveals that Americans are uninformed about options for lung cancer testing. Lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths in the U.S., resulting in more deaths than breast cancer, colon cancer, and prostate cancer combined. In spite of this, the federal government does not support early testing for lung cancer, while it does for other major cancers with comparable public health service ratings, according to the Lung Cancer Alliance.

While approximately 163,000 Americans will die of lung cancer this year, fewer than two out of five Americans (37%) have ever talked to anyone about getting tested for lung cancer, according to the survey.

"The survey confirms a desperate need to educate Americans about lung cancer testing and underscores the need for new testing options," said Laurie Fenton, President of the Lung Cancer Alliance. "One of the most effective ways of improving outcomes for lung cancer patients is early and accurate diagnosis before the cancer has had a chance to spread. Currently, 70% of all lung cancer diagnoses are late stage -- a number that is simply unacceptable."

The survey results reveal a disparity between men and women when they think of being tested for lung cancer, which is concerning given the fact that women who are non-smokers are twice as likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer than men who are non-smokers. While twenty-three percent of men thought of being tested for lung cancer, only 9% of women did.

Another knowledge gap identified by the survey is that younger people are more likely to think about being tested for lung cancer than older people (19% of people ages 18-54 compared to 9% of people age 55 and older). This is the exact opposite as the risk profile, which rises with age and is greatest for those over 55.

Perhaps the most revealing indication about the lack of general public knowledge and awareness about lung cancer testing and diagnostics is that 48% of Americans said they have heard of a blood test for lung cancer, a test that does not exist at this time.

While most Americans have heard of older tests for lung cancer, such as chest x-ray (80%), 74% MRI or CT scan, but only one-fourth of the population (26%) know about a new and effective test, autofluorescence bronchoscopy.

According to the Lung Cancer Alliance, improved funding is crucial to developing new lung cancer tests and better treatment options. "Only $1,829 is spent per patient death on lung cancer research, while $23,474 is spent per breast cancer death and $14,369 per prostate cancer death," said Laurie Fenton.

ABOUT A NEW TESTING OPTION: AUTOFLUORESCENCE BRONCHOSCOPY/ENDOSCOPY

Autofluorescence bronchoscopy is a new technology developed by Canadian company Xillix Technologies Corp. to test for lung cancer in its earliest stages. During an autofluorescence bronchoscopy, the bronchoscopist advances a flexible tube, or bronchoscope, into the lungs to look for cancerous tissue. A camera at the end of the bronchoscope captures live color video images and displays them on a monitor to help the physician navigate and examine the lungs.

For years, the only tests for lung cancer were chest x-ray or CT scan -- tests that often detect cancerous growth in the lung at a later stage. The advantage of autofluorescence bronchoscopy is that it enables the physician to get right into the lung and illuminate areas of risk. By being inside the lung and getting a real-time view of lung tissue, the physician is able to see abnormal growths even in the precancerous stages. Once inside, they are also able to easily remove suspicious tissue for biopsy so an immediate diagnosis and course of action for earlier stage cancers can begin. This way, intervention can start at an earlier stage, when the lung cancer survival rate is at its highest.

"We cannot forget that a substantial proportion of lung cancers will still start in airways that are within the reach of the bronchoscope, and I really feel that we need to use every tool available to make sure we are as sensitive as possible in detecting cancer before it becomes obvious," said Harvey Pass, M.D., Professor and Chief of the Division of Thoracic Surgery in the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery and Director of the Thoracic Oncology Program at the NYU Cancer Institute. "As we investigate novel drugs which could potentially revert precursor lesions for lung cancer back to normal, and as we develop less invasive ways of managing airway cancers, it is almost impossible to do these studies without systems like Onco-LIFE."

SURVEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

In March 2006 an omnibus survey was commissioned to determine Americans' attitudes toward getting tested for lung cancer. The telephone survey was conducted by ORC International's Caravan(R) Survey from March 2-5, 2006. The Caravan(R) Survey is based on a random-digit-dialing (RDD) probability sample of all households in the United States. The data is weighted to ensure the results reflect a representative U.S. population in terms of age, gender, geographic region, and ethnicity. Overall, 1,013 respondents age 18 and older participated in the survey, for a sampling error. The survey was funded by ConMed Corporation, an American medical device company.

ABOUT THE LUNG CANCER ALLIANCE

The Lung Cancer Alliance (LCA) is the only national non-profit organization solely dedicated to advocating on behalf of people living with lung cancer, their families and loved ones, and those at risk for the disease. In January 2006 LCA issued the first-ever Report Card on Lung Cancer, an assessment of progress being made in the battle against this lethal disease. The majority of grades received are failing.

ABOUT CONMED CORPORATION

ConMed Corporation is a medical device company based in Utica, New York. Its Endoscopic Technologies Division, the group bringing autofluorescence bronchoscopy technology to market, is a leader in innovative medical devices for pulmonary and gastrointestinal endoscopy. ConMed is the sole supplier of the Onco-LIFE(TM) system in the United States. The Onco-LIFE(TM) system is approved for sale in the United States for bronchoscopy procedures and in Europe and Canada for both lung and gastrointestinal endoscopy procedures (for colon cancer). ConMed is traded on the NASDAQ Exchange under the trading symbol CNMD. For more information, visit the company website at http://www.conmed.com.

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SOURCE  ConMed Corporation
    -0-                             03/28/2006
    /CONTACT:  Jonathan Potter of Fleishman-Hillard, +1-212-453-2406, for
ConMed/
    /Web site: http://www.conmed.com /
    (CNMD)

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