



# News Release

## **For Immediate Release**

## **World Lupus Day Will Focus on Need for Improved Healthcare And Research to Combat Under-Recognized Life-Threatening Disease**

The first-ever World Lupus Day observance will occur on Monday, May 10, 2004, to coincide with the 7th International Congress on Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and Related Conditions in New York City. World Lupus Day will focus on the need for improved patient healthcare services, increased research into the causes of and a cure for lupus, enhanced physician diagnosis and treatment of lupus, and better epidemiological data on lupus globally.

Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease that affects millions of people worldwide, both directly and indirectly. It is under-recognized as a global health problem by the public, health professionals, and governments, driving the need for greater awareness. Early recognition, diagnosis and treatment of lupus help to slow the debilitating effects of the disease. Lupus can be difficult to diagnose, however, because symptoms often mimic common illnesses. Improving awareness of lupus symptoms will save lives.

### **What Is Lupus?**

Lupus is a disease of the immune system. The immune system normally protects the body by producing antibodies, or proteins, that attach to and destroy foreign invaders, such as bacteria or viruses. In people with lupus, the immune system, for yet undiscovered reasons, produces antibodies that target the body's own healthy cells, which can lead to tissue damage, organ failure, disability or mortality. While the exact cause of lupus is not fully understood, a combination of defective genes and environmental factors are believed to cause lupus disease activity.

### **Who Gets Lupus?**

Lupus impacts people from all countries, although lupus disproportionately affects individuals of certain races and ethnicities. Lupus strikes mostly women of childbearing age (15-44), however men, children and women of all ages can develop lupus. Researchers believe at least five million people worldwide have lupus, and more than 100,000 new cases develop every year. These estimates likely are low.

## World Lupus Day (Continued)

### **The Impact of Lupus**

Several international studies have shown that lupus has a considerable impact on the health-care system and on society, due to the complexity of the disease and its treatment. Depending on which organs are affected, and the frequency and severity of disease activity, individuals with lupus may have to take multiple medications, be treated by physicians from several medical specialties depending on which organs are affected, undergo numerous medical evaluations and procedures, and be hospitalized several times per year.

### **Why World Lupus Day?**

Increasingly, efforts to identify a cause and cure for lupus are being coordinated on the international level. Multiple lupus clinics around the world are collaborating on studies and clinical trials of potential new therapies. Many findings will be presented during the 7th International Congress on SLE and Related Conditions to be held May 9 – 13 in New York City. The International Congress will bring together several thousand researchers, clinicians, patients and lupus advocacy organizations to share information and develop or strengthen collaborative initiatives to find a cause of and a cure for lupus. More than 100 lupus patient and advocacy groups throughout the world have been invited to participate in World Lupus Day activities. The crowning event will be a press conference in New York City on May 10, 2004.

### **Issues for World Lupus Day**

Medical research on lupus and efforts to develop safer and more effective therapies for the disease are under-funded in comparison with diseases of comparable magnitude and severity. No new safe and effective treatments for lupus have been introduced in more than thirty years. Current treatments for lupus are very toxic and can cause other life-threatening health problems that can be worse than the primary disease. Many physicians worldwide are unaware of symptoms and health effects of lupus, causing people with the disease to suffer several years before they are able to obtain a correct diagnosis and treatment. There is a deep, unmet need worldwide to educate and support individuals and families affected by lupus, and an urgent need to increase awareness of the symptoms and health consequences of lupus.

### **Hope on the Horizon for Lupus**

There is a growing international effort to study lupus and unravel its scientific mysteries. Many of these efforts will be highlighted during the World Lupus Day observance on May 10. For additional information, visit the World Lupus Day website at [www.worldlupusday.org](http://www.worldlupusday.org).