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Title: Characteristics of COPD exacerbations in Greece

Dr. Foteini 26592 Malli mallifoteini@yahoo.gr MD ¹, Dr. Zoe 26593 Daniil zdaniil@med.uth.gr MD ¹, Dr. Eleni 26594 Bania bania.eleni@hotmail.com MD ², Mr. Evangelos C. 26595 Alexopoulos ecalexop@med.uoa.gr MD ³, Dr. Nikolaos 26596 Tzanakis tzanakis@med.uoc.gr MD ⁴, Dr. Epaminondas 26598 Kosmas enkosmas@hol.gr MD ⁵, Dr. Michael 26605 Toumbis mtoumbis@gmail.com MD ⁵ and Prof. Konstantinos I. 26609 Goyrgoulisanis kgourg@med.uth.gr MD ¹. ¹ Respiratory Medicine Department, University of Thessaly, Medical School, Larissa, Greece ; ² Pulmonologist, Private Sector, Athens, Greece ; ³ Occupational Health Department, Onasis Cardiac Surgery Center, Athens, Greece ; ⁴ Department of Thoracic Medicine, University of Crete, Medical School, Heraklion, Greece and ⁵ Respiratory Medicine Department, Chest Diseases Hospital 'Sotiria', Athens, Greece .

Body: Background and Aims: Acute Exacerbations of COPD (AECOPD) are associated with significant morbidity and mortality. We aimed to provide data on the characteristics of AECOPD in a large group of COPD patients in Greece. Methods: Patients diagnosed with an AECOPD referred to 27 Greek hospitals and 114 chest specialists were included. Demographic data, previous treatment, lung function testing and co-morbidity were recorded. Results: Six thousand and fourteen patients were included in the study, 4360 (72.5%) males, age median (interquartile): 68(60-75) yrs. Up to 47.8% of patients were current smokers. Median BMI was 27.5kg/m² (24.9-30.6). Two or more co morbidities were found in 55.8%. The vast majority of the patients (86.4%) were receiving regular treatment for COPD before the exacerbation. The majority of patients (61%) were classified as moderate-to-severe COPD. Almost ¼ (23.4%) of patients had hypoxemic respiratory failure and 10.3% of them developed hypercapnia during stable state. A remarkable percentage of patients (28.3%) experienced more than 3 exacerbations. Patients aged >76 yrs had increased number of AECOPD vs patients aged<60 yrs(p=0.03). Disease duration >5 yrs, COPD stages of 3 or 4, comorbidity and non compliance with treatment were associated with increased annual frequency of AECOPD. Increased disease duration (>11 yrs), COPD stage 4 and non compliant patients demonstrated increased OR for ICU admission (OR(95%CI): 1.8 (1.1-2.81), p=0.018, 2.8 (1.4-5.5), p=0.002, 1.4 (1.0-2.0), p=0.043, respectively). Conclusions: Our study showed that patients presenting AECOPD have a wide range of severity, while the exacerbation rate is associated with age, disease severity stage, comorbidity and compliance with regular treatment.