



Editorial

[Translated article] Raising awareness of respiratory health and specialists in respiratory diseases



La notoriedad de la salud respiratoria y de los profesionales sanitarios que la cuidan

In September 2018, the 2018–2021 SEPAR Strategic Plan was drawn up during a meeting of the members of the SEPAR Governing Council and Board of Directors, the directors of the SEPAR Integrated Research Programs, and the directors and managers of the SEPAR Advisory Committees and other SEPAR divisions. The overall Plan consisted of ten strategic projects that would be set in motion with a series of promotional campaigns and activities to be launched between September 2018 and September 2021.^{1,2}

One of these projects involved raising public awareness of both respiratory health and the role of specialists in respiratory diseases. Over the course of the Plan, a series of campaigns were initiated to improve the profile and visibility of respiratory health not only among Spanish public health decision-makers, but also among the general public.

One of the key initiatives, and the most important campaign launched by SEPAR to date, has been *Toma Aire y Sopla Vida* [Breathe in Air, Breathe out Life].³ This project was designed to promote respiratory health, prevent lung disease, and raise the public profile and awareness of the different healthcare workers specializing in respiratory health: pulmonologists, thoracic surgeons, pediatric pulmonologists, nurses, and respiratory physiotherapists.⁴ The popular singer Antonio Orozco took part in the campaign and joined forces with pulmonologist Dr. María Cruz González Villalcausa to write a song promoting respiratory health. Leading journalist Pedro Piqueras interviewed members of SEPAR about the work of respiratory health specialists, and put his stamp on several messages about the importance of preventing respiratory diseases. The cornerstones of the campaign included a TV ad spot that was broadcast on all the main channels in Spain, a website jam-packed with information on respiratory health, and a strong presence on social media and the most popular news and educational programs on Spanish TV and radio. The results of the campaign have been spectacular: more than 192 million hits, and the ASPID Platino prize – the most important distinction awarded by medical advertising and communication professionals in Spain and Latin America – attest to the success of this initiative.⁵

The tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on respiratory health and the clinicians involved in treating respira-

tory diseases over the past 20 months. This seems an appropriate moment to draw attention to the outstanding contribution made by all respiratory health professionals to control the pandemic, and the impact it has had on raising public awareness of our specialty.⁶

To illustrate the shift in perception, we would like to share some of the results of a recent survey we conducted in a representative sample of the general Spanish population made up of 400 individuals aged 25 and over. Overall, 78% of interviewees believed some specialties had risen in prominence as a result of the epidemic, and of these, 80% thought that the status of pulmonology had increased the most. It is also interesting to note that 35% of interviewees believe that pulmonology is one of the more important fields of medicine: 2.5% ranked it in first place, and 12% in fifth place.

Interviewees were also asked about their familiarity with different medical specialties. It turns out that 82% knew that pulmonologists deal with diseases of the respiratory system; up to 64% thought that pulmonologists were very important, and 32% thought they were important.

Another important finding has been the name interviewees gave to our specialty: 47% called us pulmonologists, 41% called us respiratory specialists, and 12% defined us as lung specialists. Knowing how most people refer to our specialty will improve the way we reach out to the public, and will help us target our messages more effectively.

We were glad to see that 55% of interviewees thought that respiratory health professionals play a very important role in highlighting environmental pollution issues, while up to 37% thought this role was important. This is a clear sign that our Association needs to continue its efforts to raise awareness of the importance of air quality and climate change, and strengthens our conviction that campaigns such as the “SEPAR Year for Air Quality. Climate Change and Health” can have a significant impact and should be promoted.^{7,8}

Finally, the survey revealed another fact that will affect the future of our profession: 77% of interviewees thought that public interest in certain diseases and medical professions would increase as a result of the pandemic; 90% believed that respiratory diseases would become more relevant; and 87% believed that the pandemic would significantly raise the profile of pulmonologists.

To sum up, it is essential for SEPAR to continue its efforts to increase awareness of respiratory health and the clinicians that

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treat respiratory diseases. The current pandemic can give us considerable leverage to achieve this goal.

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