



Asthma plan could save 50 lives every year

by Conall Ó Fátharta

AT LEAST one person dies from asthma in Ireland every week, but 50 lives could be saved every year if Ireland adopted an asthma management plan.

In a presentation to the Joint Committee on Health and Children yesterday, the Asthma Society of Ireland outlined some staggering statistics on the increasing prevalence of asthma in Irish society.

Ireland has the fourth highest prevalence of asthma worldwide, with

approximately 470,000, or one in eight people, suffering from the condition.

According to chief executive of the Asthma Society of Ireland, Dr Jean Holohan, between 1983 and 2003, the number of people with asthma in Ireland increased four-fold in the 13 to 14-year-old age group.

Asthma remains the most common chronic disease in childhood and the most common respiratory condition in Ireland.

"Asthma deaths are

underreported and the true mortality is difficult to establish," said Dr Holohan.

"However, CSO reports over recent years show that at least one person dies from asthma every week in Ireland.

"Deaths from asthma are unacceptable in Ireland in 2008," she added.

Despite the availability of international guidelines on achieving and maintaining control of the condition, the group said many Irish patients have uncontrolled asthma.

Inhaled steroid is recommended to be used twice daily while rescue medication should be used twice or less per week.

In Ireland, however, a massive 51% of sufferers use their rescue medication every day.

The Asthma Society of Ireland also outlined the staggering cost of asthma to Ireland's healthcare system.

In 2003, asthma cost the state an estimated €463

million, almost four times the European cost per patient with asthma.

Speaking to the Joint Committee on Health and Children yesterday, Dr Holohan cited the Finnish experience as a model from which Ireland could learn.

At a cost of just €650,000, in total, Finland managed to reduce recorded deaths from asthma from 123 in 1993 to 13 in 2006. Hospital bed days were cut by 53% and disability payments fell by 76%.

"We can provide patient education and core programmes for healthcare professionals but without political acknowledgment that asthma is a major public health problem and a commitment that asthma care will be made a political priority, Ireland will never achieve the outcomes that Finland has seen," said Dr Holohan.