

# Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases: Journal of the COPD Foundation



## Editorial

## Remembering John W. Walsh 1949 – 2017

James D. Crapo, MD<sup>1,2</sup>

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1 Editor in Chief, *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases: Journal of the COPD Foundation*

2 National Jewish Health, Denver, Colorado

### Address correspondence to:

James D. Crapo, MD  
COPDC@njhealth.org

*Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases: Journal of the COPD Foundation* exists today because of the vision, inspiration, leadership and untiring commitment of John W. Walsh.

John's personal diagnosis with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) associated with Alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency in 1989 ignited a commitment to make a difference in a moribund disease community. At the time, COPD was one of the major causes of death in the United States and throughout the world – but had seen minimal therapeutic advances and lagged every other major disease in research investment, academic publications and had little to no patient advocacy support. In John's words the common opinion was "shame" on the patient for smoking and national attention focused on smoking cessation – while effectively ignoring the progressive impact of COPD. Clinical care was focused primarily on late stage palliation of symptoms. John dedicated his life to changing this – to changing the attitudes of patients, families, health care providers and the research community toward COPD, restoring respect for the COPD patient, enhancing communication and support for patients, expanding and refining diagnosis, improving access to care, and increasing support for clinical and basic research on COPD to find a "cure."

John started by cofounding the Alpha-1 Foundation

and then AlphaNet. He quickly recognized that the greater community of COPD individuals also needed to be served and established the COPD Foundation in 2004. When the pulmonary academic community suggested that there was value in having an open access journal in the field of COPD, John instantly embraced the concept and offered to accomplish this through a *Journal of the COPD Foundation* – giving it total support in design and execution to become a leading publication in the field. The Journal launched its first issue in May 2014 on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the COPD Foundation.

John's passion for addressing all things COPD and his vision for open access publications in the field of COPD that could stimulate and bind the academic community to the clinical practice community is being realized by the electronic distribution of each edition of the Journal to over 10,000 health care providers. Indexing of the Journal by PubMed is anticipated to occur in 2017 and will ensure that the Journal's content is searchable, preserved and easily accessible to any investigator worldwide searching for COPD resources.

John was far more than a patient advocate. In fact, he recreated the concept of a patient advocate and transformed it into a dynamic force binding patient interests, health care delivery and research to change the future of this disease. Meeting John was a transformative experience in my life. His commitment, energy and impact were unparalleled. I have strong memories of meeting with John in Denver on various COPD-related projects including Journal development. The high altitude required John to use supplemental oxygen while we discussed ideas and directions to support all things COPD. No idea was too extreme or ridiculous to be considered, no challenge too great. Then when it came time to implement, John was willing

to be anywhere necessary to make it happen. It was impossible to not follow his lead.

Everyone who interacted with John had the same experience: He led by example and was present at every opportunity that could possibly have an impact on the field of COPD, nationally and internationally. No one could fail to be inspired by his leadership. I know of no advocate for any disease that has had a personal impact equivalent to the example set by John.

Many of my interactions with John ended with a question of how he could possibly stimulate and facilitate the new ideas that were being discussed. His answer was always “if you are not at the table, you are on the table.” He was committed to being “at the table.”

Under John’s leadership over the past 2 decades, the field of COPD is being transformed. The COPD360 initiative, launched by the COPD Foundation, incorporates all things COPD – including support and interactions for the COPD patient community, support and interactions for the health care delivery community,

support and communications for the clinical research and basic research communities, and support for industry partners who will build new drugs, devices and approaches to enhance health care delivery. These combine to both enhance current health care for patients with COPD and move towards a future that will prevent the development of this disease.

John W. Walsh stands at the very top of those individuals who have influenced my life. His tragic death is a major loss, but the impact of his vision and commitment to change the field of COPD will endure through the multiple programs he created, one of which is the *Journal of the COPD Foundation*.

This issue of *Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases: Journal of the COPD Foundation* is dedicated to the life of John W. Walsh and to the fulfillment of his vision.

James D. Crapo, MD  
Editor in Chief