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MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2014***

PRESS RELEASE

A balanced gut microbiota is crucial for everyone's health – World Digestive Health Day on May 29, 2014

(March 10, 2014) Not long ago, the scientific investigation of the gut microbiota was one of the less highlighted areas within gastroenterology. This has changed profoundly over the past few years: a wealth of fascinating findings about the microbial life inside our guts and its impact on our well-being has moved this issue into the centre of medical and public attention.

Aptly, the topic of this year's World Digestive Health Day (WDHD, www.wgofoundation.org/wdhd-2014.html) is "Gut Microbes – Importance in Health and Disease". WDHD is organised by the World Gastroenterology Organisation (WGO) and will be celebrated on May 29, 2014. It is chaired by Professor Francisco Guarner from the University Hospital Vall d'Hebron (Barcelona, Spain), who belongs to the world's leading gut microbiota experts and was one of the speakers at the Gut Microbiota for Health World Summit in Miami, USA, on March 8–9, 2014. He welcomed the opportunity, provided by this event, to further raise the awareness of the upcoming WDHD and to spread its messages.

Digestive health – a matter of daily diet and lifestyle

Prof. Guarner emphasized the timeliness of WGO's agenda setting: "Our gastrointestinal tract harbours a large and diverse ecosystem of microbial communities that can truly be regarded as a 'new organ' in itself. It plays key roles in digestion, metabolism and immune function, and thus deserves the increased attention of the public and of health-care professionals alike. In healthy subjects' guts, the composition of this multifarious community is well-balanced: microbial species that, if dominating, might be harmful, are held in check by beneficial ones, so that the overall interactions of these organisms are to the benefit of the human host. But if the normal distribution of organisms and the relationships is disturbed, it is likely to result in gastrointestinal troubles. To preserve or restore this balance is not only a matter of medical treatment, but also of our daily lifestyle. Through an appropriate diet, we ourselves can do a lot to maintain our gastrointestinal health. Therefore, this year's WDHD motto, which was announced at the World Congress of Gastroenterology and Asian Pacific Digestive Week in China last September, matches perfectly the WGO's general goal to raise the awareness of digestive disorders and the possibilities to improve their management. WDHD 2014 will help a lot to get these messages across on a global scale."

Transfer into health-care practice

As changes in the diversity and composition of the gut microbiota communities alter their physiological functions, they can be linked to a number of disorders, including functional bowel disorders, inflammatory bowel diseases and other immune mediated diseases, such as coeliac disease and certain allergies. Also, metabolic conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, and perhaps even behavioural disorders, such as autism and depression, could be linked to gut microbial imbalances.

“We are now at a state of research where basic scientific results are about to be translated into new diagnostic and prognostic tools, as well as into efficient therapeutic means: novel developments in the fields of functional foods, probiotics, prebiotics and microbiota transplants will provide symptom relief, as well as support prevention and even provide lasting benefits in a variety of diseases,” says Professor Eamonn Quigley, Chairman of the WGO Foundation. “It is exactly this process of transfer into daily health-care practice that our campaign seeks to support by developing educational and training platforms and informational materials through collaboration with WGO member societies all over the world. Such tools include, among others, a WGO Gut Microbes Manual, an update of the WGO Probiotics and Prebiotics Guideline, as well as symposia and meetings. Experts are welcome to visit our website and propose events. We have to take seriously the fact that the gut microbiota is not just a mere assembly of microorganisms, but rather an organ in itself, the importance of which, in terms of global health care, can hardly be overestimated.”

Increasing awareness of the “new organ”

Prof. Quigley points to some really breathtaking facts: the gut microbiota includes the incredible number of at least 100 trillion bacteria, belonging to more than 1,000 species, and weighing between 1.5 and 2kg. It consists of 10 times as many cells as there are human cells in the body – thus, speaking in terms of the number of cells, we are in fact more “bacterial” than human. The gut microbiota’s metagenome – the so-called “microbiome” – turns out to be much more diverse than the human genome.

In organising WDHD 2014, WGO will be supported by its long-term partner Danone, which also supports the educational campaign ‘Love Your Tummy’ (www.loveyourtummy.org) that was launched by WGO in 2012 and seeks to increase awareness, understanding and management of digestive well-being by emphasizing the importance of taking care of one’s gut microbiota. Danone’s conviction is that food plays an essential role in human health; namely, through the impact that the gut microbiota may have on health. That is why Danone also supports the Gut Microbiota for Health World Summit and Experts Exchange web platform with the aim to encourage research and increase knowledge in this promising area, in line with its mission to “bring health through food to as many people as possible”.

About the Gut Microbiota For Health Experts Exchange website

The www.gutmicrobiotaforhealth.com Experts Exchange, provided by the Gut Microbiota & Health Section of ESNM, is an online platform for health-care professionals, scientists, and other people interested in the field. Thanks to being an open, independent and participatory medium, this digital service enables a scientific debate in the field of gut microbiota.

Connected to www.gutmicrobiotaforhealth.com, the Twitter account @GMFHx, animated by experts, for experts from the medical and scientific community, actively contributes to the online exchanges about the gut microbiota. **Follow @GMFHx on Twitter. You can follow the Twitter coverage of the event using #GMFH2014**



About the Gut Microbiota & Health Section of ESNM

ESNM stands for the European Society of Neurogastroenterology and Motility, a member of United European Gastroenterology (UEG). The mission of the ESNM is to defend the interests of all professionals in Europe involved in the study of neurobiology and pathophysiology of gastrointestinal function. The Gut Microbiota & Health Section was set up to increase recognition of the links between the gut microbiota and human health, to spread knowledge and to raise interest in the subject. The Gut Microbiota & Health Section is open to professionals, researchers, and practitioners from all fields related to gut microbiota and health.

www.esnm.eu/gut_health/gut_micro_health.php?navId=68

About the AGA

The American Gastroenterological Association is the trusted voice of the GI community. Founded in 1897, the AGA has grown to include more than 16,000 members from around the globe who are involved in all aspects of the science, practice and advancement of gastroenterology. The AGA Institute administers the practice, research and educational programmes of the organisation. www.gastro.org

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