



TALKING WITH PATIENTS SO THEY GET THE HELP THEY NEED TO QUIT SMOKING

In 2010 the U.S. Surgeon General reminded the nation that “every cigarette does you damage,” so even occasional smokers are at increased risk of heart attacks, heart disease and other tobacco-related health consequences.

Tobacco is the number-one preventable cause of death in the United States. Despite widespread knowledge of the serious consequences associated with smoking cigarettes, more than 45 million Americans continue to smoke. Research finds that more than 70% of smokers want to quit, but many lack the tools and resources to effectively quit smoking long-term. Because 70% of smokers see a physician each year, and over half see a dentist, healthcare providers (HCPs) are one of the most important allies a smoker can have. When it comes to helping patients understand the health risks of smoking and become better informed about the quitting process, no one is better positioned than physicians, nurses, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, dentists, pharmacists and other HCPs.

CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

- One in 10 smokers stated they have concealed their smoking status from an HCP.
- Nearly half of smokers who stated that they have concealed their smoking status from an HCP indicated the reason they did so was because they felt ashamed about their smoking.
 - Two-thirds (66%) reported not wanting to be lectured about smoking by their HCP.

Unfortunately, the reality is that many smokers are not only dealing with their addiction but also facing the social stigma that comes with smoking. For some this makes it hard to take that crucial first step of talking to their doctors about their addiction.

Data suggest that nearly six million smokers could be missing an opportunity to discuss quitting smoking with their healthcare providers. If smokers are not admitting their smoking for what it really is — a medical condition or addiction — it may prevent them from acknowledging the importance of quitting.

TALKING TO SMOKERS ABOUT QUITTING

Many smokers know WHY they should quit but often don't know HOW. Many have struggled and repeatedly failed to quit successfully. Healthcare providers have an important role to play in helping smokers take that first step and helping smokers get on the path to quitting successfully. Even those HCPs bound by time constraints can make a difference with a minimal intervention. Here are some tips and guidelines to help healthcare providers start these important conversations:

- Talk openly about smoking. This will open the door to successful intervention.
- When advising smokers to quit, be positive and encouraging. Smokers are often dealing with shame or fear of quitting. Congratulate the smoker on the decision to quit and reiterate how you are there to help them on their journey.



GETTING TO QUIT

- Encourage smokers not to give up. Nicotine dependence is a chronic, relapsing condition; the average smoker makes 11 quit attempts before quitting successfully. Remind smokers that quitting is difficult, but it is attainable.
- Refer smokers to appropriate smoking cessation treatments by identifying both their smoking status and their willingness to quit. Some treatments are covered under health insurance, including pharmaceuticals and quit smoking courses or programs.
- For the smoker unwilling to quit, remind them of the adverse health effects of smoking (e.g., up to 50% of long-term smokers will die of a smoking-related disease). Evidence has shown that even a brief clinician-delivered intervention can enhance motivation to quit and increase quit attempts.
- Provide information on treatment options for the smoker willing to quit, working with them to create an individualized quit plan tailored to their circumstances.

PLEASE ASK YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT THEIR SMOKING STATUS. IT COULD SAVE THEIR LIVES.

- Ask every patient if they smoke.
- If they indicate that they only smoke “socially” (e.g., only occasionally, on weekends or when they drink alcohol), gently remind them that even low levels of smoking can be a sign of nicotine addiction and have health risks.
- Urge every smoker to quit in a clear, strong and personalized manner. Quitting smoking is among the most important ways someone can reduce their risk for adverse health outcomes.
- Suggest they consider evidence-based treatments such as over-the-counter or prescription medications, or refer them to counseling or additional treatment to help them quit.
- Advise them to call the national toll-free quitline, 1-800-QUIT-NOW, for free counseling or seek help from no-cost websites like BecomeAnEX.org for personalized quit plans and social support.
- Arrange follow-up contact as necessary to prevent relapse and troubleshoot problems.

All HCPs should screen patients for tobacco use, strongly advise smokers to quit and provide at least brief behavioral counseling and medication advice. HCPs should refer smokers to other proven-effective services, including more intensive counseling, when they cannot effectively provide the services themselves.

For detailed information on clinical interventions for tobacco use and dependence, including guidelines for prescribing medication and promoting motivation to quit, please see Fiore MC, Jaen CR, Baker TB, et al. *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence: 2008 Update. Clinical Practice Guideline. 2008.* Available online at surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating_tobacco_use08.pdf

And the corresponding quick reference guide for physicians: ahrq.gov/clinic/tobacco/tobaqrg.pdf

These materials were developed in collaboration with, and through a sponsorship funded by, Pfizer, Inc.