

ROLE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN TOBACCO CESSATION

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Tobacco dependence is a chronic condition that frequently necessitates and cessation activities world-wide. Tobacco epidemic in India and South East Asia region differs from other developed countries. Tobacco use in India is prevalent among 28.6% of tobacco users with higher prevalence among males (42.4%) and 14.2% in females.

Smokeless forms of tobacco are more prevalent in developing countries like India. Khaini is used most commonly (11.2%) followed by bidi (7.7%), gutka (6.8%) and betel quid with tobacco (5.8%) tobacco users are willing to quit tobacco. However the penetration of different methods to support cessation by health professionals remains low. Most users are attempting to quit, but without any support. Most users who are attempting to quit are unsuccessful to sustain the quit status for even a month. A small proportion of smokers (4.1%) even make the wrong choice of switching to smokeless tobacco as an approach to quitting. Dental professionals are in the unique position in helping tobacco users as they can reach large numbers of tobacco users and have considerable potential in persuading them to quit. Dental patients are particularly receptive to health messages at periodic check-ups, and oral effects of tobacco use provide visible evidence and a strong motivation for tobacco users to quit. Oral manifestations can assist customize interventions and boost their effectiveness, especially among young users in the early stages of tobacco initiation. One unique aspect of dentistry is that some of the adverse health effects of tobacco use are clinically apparent in the oral cavity at even relatively early stages of use. Further dentists spend chair side time diagnosing and treating patients which can be utilized as “Teachable Moments” for bringing about health behaviour change effectively.



Oral Health examination

As emphasized in the World Oral Health Report 2003, there are also ethical, moral and practical reasons why oral health professionals can play an important role in helping tobacco users to quit:

- They are especially concerned about the adverse effects caused by tobacco use in the oral cavity.
- They typically have access to children, young people and their caregivers, thus providing opportunities to influence individuals to quit or never begin using tobacco.
- They often have more time with patients than many other health professionals, providing opportunities to integrate tobacco cessation interventions into their clinical practice.
- They often treat women of childbearing age, and are thus able to explain the potential harm to babies from tobacco use.
- They can build their patient's interest in discontinuing tobacco use by showing actual effects of tobacco in the mouth.
- They are as effective as other health professionals in helping tobacco users quit.

In addition to helping current users quit in clinical settings, dental health care professionals can play a vital role in providing community-based tobacco cessation services, building capacity and creating relevant information regarding tobacco use and its ill-effects. At the community

level, local dental societies and dentists can become involved in local tobacco control coalitions, which function to mobilize and empower the community to make the changes that support non-use of tobacco. Community-based programs may include activities such as educating the public on the health hazards of environmental tobacco smoke, promoting smoke-free restaurants, and encouraging policies and programs that support prevention and cessation of tobacco use.

CONCLUSION

Helping patients quit tobacco as a part of routine practice takes only three to five minutes which is feasible, effective and efficient. All dental healthcare professionals should also promote tobacco-free workplace strategies. Dental health professionals can become role models in many ways in quitting tobacco from being an advocate of change, researcher, health educator and clinician, which will not only help individuals but also change community health behaviour.