

Incentives help smokers quit, MSU study shows

Incentives to quit smoking — including on-the-job support from co-workers, money, and extended social support for six months to keep ex-smokers off the habit — achieved an 86 percent success rate in a project conducted by two Michigan State University psychiatry professors.

Billed as a "smoking cessation program that works," the office-based project involved 15 "smoking" employees of the Michigan Hospital Association, headquartered in Lansing.

When the six-month program ended in December, 12 of the 15 were still successfully abstaining from cigarettes, "a remarkable success rate" according to Dr. Bertram E. Stoffelmayr and Dr. Thomas J. Stachnik of MSU's Department of Psychiatry. The department is a unit of two MSU medical schools, the College of Human Medicine and the College of Osteopathic Medicine and the College of Osteopathic Medicine.

EVEN MORE impressive, they say, is the fact that their many-faceted program attracted 47 percent of the association's total smoking population (32) who elected to make a long-term effort to kick the habit.

"That figure is inordinately high when compared to the percentage of target smokers that other smoking cessation programs have been able to attract," the researchers point out.

"Taking both measures into account — 12 of the original 32 smokers are now ex-smokers or a reduction in the target population of a whopping 37 percent."

Even better success was recorded with the researchers' program at Capitol Saving and Loan, also in Lansing. Of 17 employee smokers, 12 joined the stop smoking program, and 11 went the full distance.

Stachnik and Stoffelmayr contend that if smoking is to be approached as a public health problem (58 million smokers), there must be attractive, accessible programs to lure those millions of smokers who know they should quit but need immediate incentive and solid support systems "to make it happen."

The researchers also point out the severe economic losses due to industry and employees due to cigarette smoking. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, total economic costs attributable to smoking in 1976 totaled more than \$27 billion. This included more than \$19 billion in lost production, more than \$8 billion in direct health care costs, and \$175 million in fire losses.

WHY DOES the MSU program work so well?

The researchers say that while it is difficult to be precise, five factors seem apparent.

- The program was offered in the participants' work setting so that no special effort was required to attend a clinic.

- The financial incentive clearly played a role. At the Michigan Hospital Association, each smoker placed \$25 in escrow with the employer who in turn set aside another \$125 for each participant. Return of funds was based on the non-smoking "performance."

- Six months is relatively long for such a program and appears to be a key factor in reinforcing the non-smoking behavior or "maintaining abstinence." Most programs to stop smoking ignore the maintenance period.

- Participants are able to share the discomfort of quitting smoking with work colleagues and partake of that mutual support to stay off the cigarettes for six months.

To stop smoking, the researchers agree, means a smoker has to counter a formidable habit, often related to a wide variety of extremely pleasurable activities — good food, good conversation, drinking alcohol and coffee, being at a party, watching TV and making love.

"After being associated many times with these activities, some of their attractions rubs off onto smoking," the researchers say.

"Smoking becomes woven into a person's lifestyle to the extent that life with out cigarettes seems empty, and just thinking about quitting makes the world-be quitter downright depressed."

THEY SAY cigarette smoking is an extremely ingrained habit just in terms of sheer frequency that a smoker has engaged in the act.

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