

World No Tobacco Day, May 31, 2007

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Every year on May 31st, the World Health Organization sponsors the World No Tobacco Day to increase public awareness of the effects tobacco has on the world's health and to encourage government to develop and enforce stronger tobacco product regulations. This year's World No Tobacco Day focuses on 100% smoke-free environments as the only effective measure to protect the public from exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke. While World No Tobacco Day may have just passed it is important to keep in mind the dangers and breadth of the tobacco use.

Fact 1 Tobacco: A killer epidemic and problem for everyone

Tobacco is the second major cause of death in the world killing half of today's 650 million regular smokers and hundreds of thousands of non-smokers each year. The epidemic is expected to continue growing, in effect, killing 250 million of today's children and adolescents over the span of their lifetime. Current trends show that within the next 15 – 20 years, tobacco is likely to be the world's leading cause of death and disability, killing more than 10 million people each year. That's more lives claimed annually than HIV, tuberculosis, maternal mortality, motor vehicle accidents, suicide, and homicide combined. Of these deaths, 70% occur in developing countries.

Despite widespread knowledge of the harm caused by smoking, only modest success has been achieved in global tobacco control. Worldwide consumption of manufactured cigarettes jumped from 2.8 trillion in 1967 to 5.7 trillion in 1992 with consumption per smoker increasing by 25%. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one third of the global population aged 15 years and older still smokes (~ 1.1 billion people).

Fact 2 Tobacco Use: A shorter life span and patterns of mortality

While smoking rates have generally declined among adults in developed countries 20% of all deaths in the 1990s, 35% and 15% of men and women between 35 and 69 years old respectively, were due to tobacco products. Rates in developing countries are rising. Life-long smokers average a 50% chance of dying from tobacco use, losing years from their normal life expectancy as a result of their habit. This shortened life span is often plagued with development and aggravation of any number of chronic diseases which take a toll on quality of life. Some diseases or conditions related to tobacco use include: cancers of the oral cavity, larynx, lung, esophagus, bladder, pancreas, renal pelvis, stomach, and cervix; heart disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, chronic obstructive lung disease, peptic ulcer disease, low birth-weight babies, unsuccessful pregnancies, and increased infant mortality such as from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). So, not only is life expectancy reduced but overall quality of life suffers.

Fact 3 Tobacco products: A highly addictive and well advertised commodity

All tobacco products contain substantial amounts of nicotine, which is absorbed readily in the lungs and the mouth or nose. Nicotine has been clearly recognized as a drug of

addiction with tobacco dependence classified as a mental and behavioral disorder according to the WHO International Classification of Diseases, ICD-10 (Classification F17.2). Experts consider tobacco dependence to be as strong as or stronger than dependence on substances such as heroin or cocaine making quitting very difficult. Some studies report that while 75% - 85% of smokers want to quit, less than half succeed before the age of 60 despite making at least three serious attempts to do so.

Tobacco products are carefully designed to undermine efforts to quit using them. Tobacco use is woven into every aspect of society through media advertisement and cultural and societal acceptance and modeling. If a person remains smoke-free throughout adolescence it is highly unlikely that he or she will ever begin smoking. Therefore, it is vital that intensive efforts be made to help young people stay smoke-free. However, with total cigarette advertising expenditure increasing six-fold between 1975 and 1988, smokers wanting to quit are up against a barrage of powerful tobacco endorsements. The US tobacco industry alone spent \$3.27 billion in advertising in 1988, almost double the total global tobacco advertising expenditure a decade earlier!

Fact 4 Quitting Tobacco: At any age it means a healthier life

Smoking cessation has immediate and substantial health benefits and dramatically reduces the risk of most smoking-related diseases. For example, one year after quitting, the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) decreases by 50%. Within 15 years, the relative risk of dying from CHD or from cancer, for an ex-smoker, approaches that of a lifetime non-smoker. Recent evidence shows that while quitting before the age of 35 produces the greatest benefit, giving up tobacco at any age will result in substantial benefits to one's health and well being. Abstinence from tobacco products and freedom from exposure to second-hand smoke are necessary for maximizing health and minimizing risk and is the only way to eliminate tobacco related health risks. No amount of tobacco use is safe but quitting now will improve a person's quality of life and life expectancy in just a few years.

Effective treatment for tobacco dependence helps the individual user as well as impacting overall public health. Remember, second-hand smoke affects children in addition to adults. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are at an increased risk of asthma development and aggravation, impaired lung function, ear and respiratory infections, more coughs and colds, developing lymphoma, and dying from SIDS related complications. As a result, greater tobacco control is necessary, among children and adolescents to *prevent* tobacco use and among adults to *prevent* and *assist smokers in quitting* the habit. To do this a comprehensive effort involving all tiers of society is crucial if prevention of and quitting tobacco use is to be permanent. A variety of educational, behavioral and supportive techniques should be utilized.

The World No Tobacco Day is a first step in this direction, familiarizing health facilities, communities, schools, workplaces, and families with the health benefits of a smoke-free society. For more free information about quitting and local services call the Center for Disease Control and Prevention smoking cessation line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or ACCESS Community Health and Research Center at 313-216-2200.