

How to Help Patients With Nicotine Addiction

By Gary Tedeschi, Ph.D., Clinical Director, California Smokers' Helpline, UCSD Moores Cancer Center

Despite reductions in smoking in recent decades, tobacco use remains the leading cause of premature death among Americans. Not surprisingly, many patients seen by health care providers are tobacco users suffering from tobacco-related illness. This fact presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is to provide adequate treatment for the presenting concerns of so many tobacco-using patients. The opportunity is to help them make healthy choices to prevent such illnesses in the future.

Recognizing the tremendous value of this opportunity, the California Smokers' Helpline recommends that health care providers follow the *Ask, Advise, Refer* intervention at every patient visit:

- *Ask* all patients if they use tobacco
- *Advise* those who do to quit
- *Refer* them to cessation resources such as the California Smokers' Helpline (1-800-NO-BUTTS)

Providers who consistently follow these steps can have a dramatic impact on the prevalence of tobacco use among their patients.

The Helpline has been scientifically proven by UCSD researchers to double a smoker's chance of quitting successfully. Together, the provider and the Helpline ensure that patients have the best possible chance of success.

To make referral easy, providers can simply hand their patients a gold *Take Charge* card. These durable plastic cards look like credit cards and list the Helpline's toll-free number on the front and a brief description of services on the back. Providers can order Gold Cards and other patient materials free of charge at www.nobutts.org.

Every patient interaction is a teachable moment in which patients may realize the connection between quitting and improved health, and all health care providers--not just physicians--can help them reach this point.

The California Smokers' Helpline (1-800-NO-BUTTS) is a free evidence-based telephone counseling service available to California residents wanting to quit tobacco. Services are available in six different languages (English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese) and specialized services are also available for teens, pregnant women, and tobacco chewers. The Helpline is funded by the California Department of Public Health and First 5 California. To order free patient materials, visit www.nobutts.org.