

ONLINE FIRST

Encouraging Smokers to Talk With Their Physicians About Quitting

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OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, PHYSICIANS MAY see an increase in patients asking for help in quitting smoking. Why? The Office on Smoking and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently launched the second stage of its national media campaign, *Tips from Former Smokers (Tips)*.¹ Some of the ads include a new call to action with the message, “You can quit. Talk with your doctor for help.”¹ This “talk with your doctor” initiative provides physicians with a golden opportunity to help more patients quit smoking.

The *Tips* campaign motivates smokers to quit and directs smokers who want help to evidence-based cessation resources. The campaign ads feature real stories from former smokers about how serious smoking-related diseases have affected their lives and their families. The campaign includes both well-known consequences of smoking such as lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, as well as lesser-known consequences such as stroke, heart disease, head and neck cancer, Buerger disease, and exacerbation of asthma and diabetes. Stories emphasize the morbidity caused by smoking, rather than mortality, based on what we heard from smokers during formative testing. The campaign includes ads for television, radio, billboards, newspapers, and magazines, as well as for digital and social media channels.

Each *Tips* ad ends by providing a cessation resource for smokers who want help quitting: 1-800-QUIT-NOW, which directs callers to their state quitlines for free cessation counseling, or the *Tips* campaign website,¹ which provides information on the campaign and practical quitting advice.

National television ads during the week of May 27 will include the “talk with your doctor” call-to-action message, and it will continue to be promoted for the remaining 3 weeks of the campaign. This message is intended to empower patients to ask their physicians for advice about quitting smoking and to make it easier for clinicians to engage smokers in this conversation.

How can physicians use the *Tips* campaign to raise the topic of quitting with patients who smoke? First, physicians can ask patients if they have seen any of the *Tips* ads, what they think of the ads, and if the ads motivated them

to try to quit. Physicians can also underscore the truth of the stories in the ads, based on their experience with patients who smoke. If patients have not seen the ads, physicians can encourage them to view the ads.¹ Physicians can also place *Tips* posters (available from the health care practitioner section of the *Tips* website²) in waiting rooms and examination rooms.

What can a physician do when a patient asks for help in quitting smoking? The *Tips* campaign provides a great opportunity to discuss a patient’s concerns about smoking and quitting, as well as to personalize the risks the patient faces from smoking, and strongly encourage the patient to quit. Physicians can also reassure patients who smoke that, although quitting is difficult, they can succeed, reminding them that more than half of all Americans who ever smoked have successfully quit. In addition, physicians can encourage their patients to use evidence-based treatments, including individual, group, and telephone counseling and the 7 US Food and Drug Administration–approved medications, and let patients know these methods can double their chances of success.³ Patients can access more cessation resources at the *Tips* campaign website,¹ including materials and links to the National Cancer Institute’s cessation programs.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been working with numerous professional associations, such as the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College of Physicians, and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, to get the word out about the “talk with your doctor” initiative. For example, a scripted card is available to assist physicians in navigating the process of intervening with patients who smoke.² To support the “talk with your doctor” initiative, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a special section of the *Tips* campaign website for health care practitioners, which includes links to materials and resources.²

In addition, all smokers have access to free help from their state quitline by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW. Many state quitlines provide free cessation medications to some

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callers. Quitlines are staffed by trained coaches and provide callers with counseling, practical information about how to quit, and referrals to other cessation resources. Meta-analyses and large randomized trials suggest these evidence-based, convenient services are associated with increased quit rates, have broad reach, and are effective with diverse populations.³ State quitlines can ease the burden on busy clinicians by providing in-depth cessation assistance to their patients. Most state quitlines accept fax referrals from physicians, and some are starting to accept electronic referrals as well. When Tips' ads were on the air last year (March through June 2012), more than 200 000 additional calls were made to 1-800-QUIT-NOW than were received during the same period in 2011.⁴

Quitting smoking is difficult, and smokers may become discouraged. As outlined by Rigotti,⁵ physicians can encourage their patients to keep trying to quit by monitoring their progress and continuing to offer help at every visit. Watching the ads and videos on the Tips campaign website may help sustain motivation for continued abstinence.

One reason so few physicians smoke is that they are well aware of the serious health effects of smoking. Most smokers may be unaware of these health risks until it is too late. The Tips campaign pulls back the examination room curtain and confronts patients with the consequences they are likely to face if they continue smoking.

The ads feature more than 20 people with smoking-related stories, including patients with head and neck cancer, tracheostomy, and lung cancer. The ads are meant to evoke a strong emotional response in the viewer. The quiet dignity with which these patients tell their stories is a key to the success of the Tips campaign. They refuse to be victims; instead, they share the ordeals they went through with the hope of helping inspire others to quit smoking before they develop serious disease and disability.

More than 20 years ago, Fiore⁶ called for physicians to adopt tobacco use status as a vital sign that physicians should

routinely screen for, document, and address. Physicians have made major strides over the past 2 decades in helping smokers quit, but still fall short of making cessation treatment a routine part of standard care. By making it easier to discuss smoking, the "talk with your doctor" initiative can help bring the nation a step closer to achieving the goal of substantially reducing smoking and smoking-related disease and death.

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