



First international guidance launched for primary care practitioners on smoking cessation – published by the International Primary Care Respiratory Group

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Available at: <http://www.theipcr.org/smoking/index.php>

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Cigarettes kill half their lifelong users. Most smokers will have contact with a primary care practitioner and could be helped to stop. Helping patients quit smoking, or preventing them from smoking in the first place is the single most important thing a primary care practitioner can do to improve health. Therefore today the International Primary Care Respiratory Group (IPCRG), an international umbrella organisation for national primary care respiratory interest groups, (www.theipcr.org), has launched a set of implementation strategies to support primary care practitioners to enable their patients quit smoking.

“This is the first international guidance geared to the needs of primary care practitioners across the world and is full of practical and useful tips on how to help patients quit smoking successfully” said Dr Hilary Pinnock, Editor of the Guidance and IPCRG Education Co-lead. Dr Pinnock explains “Evidence shows that primary care practitioners have a critically important role in this process but many have no training or support. The IPCRG smoking cessation guidance addresses this need.”



This guidance is underpinned by evidence-based research and the experience and expertise from a range of countries. They provide practical advice on creating a smoking aware office, how to use quitlines, a motivational approach to supporting quit attempts, and how to use pharmacotherapies within the time constraints of primary care consultations.

“Smoking and the consequential addiction to nicotine is a very difficult habit to break – even if a patient wants to give up. It is important to use empathy and a non-judgmental style.” said Professor Van Schayck, Chairman of the Guidance Committee.

Whatever the resources within the healthcare system, the IPCRG believes that there is something that every primary care practitioner can do to reduce the number of smokers. The practical guidance will help clinicians whether they wish to help their patients quit successfully or influence their government’s smoking policies. The guidance is freely available to all primary care professionals and may be downloaded from the IPCRG web-site <http://www.theipcr.org/smoking/index.php>

About smoking and the importance of quitting

Despite the fact that smoking has been in overall decline in high-income countries for decades,¹ tobacco is the single largest cause of avoidable death in the European Union (EU), accounting for more than half a million deaths every year and more than a million in Europe as a whole.² In low and middle income countries smoking prevalence continues to increase rapidly. Interestingly, as the guidance shows, as soon as the last cigarette is stubbed out the body starts to repair and ‘cleanse’ itself; in the first 24 hours, carbon monoxide is eliminated from the body and after 48 hours nicotine is eliminated from the body.³ Other health benefits of quitting take longer. After ten years, the risk of lung cancer falls to half that of a smoker.



How primary care professionals can help

Research from the World Health Organization (WHO), shows that even brief advice from a healthcare professional is effective in helping a smoker commit to making a quit attempt.⁴ Other research shows that 2.5% of smokers quit for at least six months after brief advice from a family doctor.⁵ More intensive intervention in the form of pharmacotherapy with behavioral support results in sustained quit rates of 19%.⁶

Nicotine is highly addictive,⁷ and the guidance describe how primary care professionals can help patients overcome their addiction.

Pharmacotherapy, particularly when used in conjunction with behavioral counselling, has been shown to improve long term quit rates. There are different types of pharmacotherapy: nicotine replacement therapy, bupropion, nortriptyline (where the cost of licensed smoking cessation drugs is prohibitive) and more recently varenicline. These drugs alleviate many of the withdrawal symptoms associated with nicotine. The guidance advises that there is no consistent high quality evidence that hypnotherapy and acupuncture have a greater effect than placebo in helping a patient to give up successfully.

National implementation of the guidance will depend upon available resources, but it is important to note that there is something that every primary care practitioner can do to reduce the number of smokers. The challenge that the IPCRG and its members are taking on is to support primary care practitioners to use the guidance to create solutions that work for them, whatever resources they have available.

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Notes to editors

Further information about the IPCRG can be found on its website: www.theipcr.org

The IPCRG has also published international primary care respiratory guidelines in its Medline-listed journal, the Primary Care Respiratory Journal: IPCRG Guidelines for the Management of Chronic Respiratory Diseases in Primary Care. Volume 15 Issue 1 February 2006
<http://www.thepcrj.org/journ/guidelines.php>

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The IPCRG smoking cessation guidance is accompanied by a 2-page desktop helper also on the IPCRG website. Hard copies are also available upon request from the IPCRG or Pfizer representatives.



References

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⁵ Silagy C. Physician advice for smoking cessation. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2000;2:CD000165

⁶ West R, McNeill A, Raw M. Smoking cessation guidelines for health professionals: an update. Thorax 2000;55:987-999

⁷ Nicotine Addiction in Britain – a Report of the Tobacco Advisory Group. London: Royal College of Physicians, 2000