

# The Nicotine Challenger

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This issue: Zyban

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## For Your Bookshelf



A new book, *How to Quit Smoking and Not Gain Weight Cookbook*, by Dr. Linda Ferry and dietician Mary Donkersloot, will be available in November from Random House. It's full of

delicious, low-calorie, low-fat recipes to address one of the issues facing many people who are about to quit smoking. The book includes an introduction by former US Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop.

The current issue (September, October, November) of the quarterly publication, *Primary Care Clinics in Office Practice*, is: "Tobacco Use Cessation." Editor John Spangler has gathered fourteen chapters to cover the topics primary care clinicians need to know to help a client stop smoking. Two of the chapters were written by Linda Ferry. To obtain a copy, contact the publisher, WB Saunders Co. at 215-238-5503

The September *JAMA* (Journal of the American Medical Association) features an article on the results of Dr. Ferry's survey of US medical schools' curriculum on tobacco. The discouraging results were that, in the majority of medical schools, third and fourth year medical students learn how to treat diabetes, hypertension, and how to care for patients in the hospital and clinic, but are not taught how to help their patients stop smoking.

## And on the web

In the near future, clinicians will be able to amass between four and eight hours of CEU or CME credits by taking a course on treating tobacco dependence on-line. Dr. Ferry's website is still in development, but take a preview tour by going to <http://www.findhelp.com>.

Why a website? "Most of what's available now is for health educators to learn how to implement behavior modification information," Dr. Ferry said. "This section of the website will be about how to manage all the clinical problems that smokers face and that are so difficult for clinicians."

## CHAMPION VS. TOBACCO

### Linda Ferry, MD, MPH

In 1979, at the beginning of her family practice residency, with an enthusiastic interest in helping people improve their health, Linda Hyder Ferry, MD, MPH, delivered the physician lectures for the stop smoking program at the University of Texas in Galveston. After teaching these classes for a few years, it became clear that very few people were quitting smoking. For Dr. Ferry, the challenge of watching people struggle with tobacco was inspiring. "I was just so impressed with the power tobacco had on these people. It instilled a desire to learn more," Dr. Ferry said. "I had certainly told a lot of patients when I was in medical school to stop smoking, but no one taught me how to help them."



Currently, Dr. Ferry is the Director of Preventive Medicine at the Loma Linda Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Loma Linda, California. For the last twelve years, one of her major interests has been how to help the hard-core, high-risk, predominantly-male population of veterans quit smoking. Dealing with that, and teaching medical students and residents how to become effective interventionists, in her role as Associate Professor of Preventive Medicine and Family Medicine at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, has molded her interests in the clinical aspects of helping people stop smoking. "I call myself a street fighter with tobacco," she said, "because I am on the frontlines, dealing with hundreds of people every week who come to our program to quit smoking."

From 1987 through 1990, the quit rate at the VA Hospital was only about five percent. This 95% failure rate sent Dr. Ferry on a quest for a new way to help clients stop smoking. Reading and research about depression and smoking led her to start looking for an agent to stabilize the brain chemistry, mimic nicotine's effect and

reduce the need for nicotine. "I knew there was a high degree of depression in my veterans at the hospital," Dr. Ferry said. "In fact, I studied them over several years and found that 50% of both men and women who came to our program fit the criteria for depressive symptoms, if not major depression. Fifty percent!"

Although Prozac was being widely used for depression, in studies to evaluate its effect on smoking, it had no benefit. A psychiatrist Dr. Ferry worked with encouraged her to try bupropion. He reported that some patients treated with bupropion for depression found their depression was better, they were drinking less coffee, the desire to binge on chocolate was gone, and they were no longer feeling the need to smoke. Dr. Ferry's reaction? "We need to investigate this!"

After trying, without success, to get funding to study smoking and bupropion, Dr. Ferry pared the research down to fifty patients and conducted the study herself, with funds from the university to pay for the drugs and the lab tests. The results were astounding. In 1992, Dr. Ferry brought her results to Glaxo-Wellcome. After completing a larger, well-funded study in 1994, Glaxo-Wellcome completed the trials the FDA needed, and in July of 1997, Zyban (the brand name for bupropion when used to treat nicotine dependence) was approved.

In nine years of Zyban use, the VA Hospital changed the stop-smoking rate from 5% percent to 35%. "Nicotine does something to people's brains that makes them unable to give it up," Dr. Ferry points out. "There are other ways to end that addiction: stabilizing the neurochemistry with something not addicting and not a replacement, something that is actually corrective. It's been really exciting being able to contribute that to the field."

