

Tobacco Dependence and Mental Illness



This is our first column on Tobacco Dependence and Mental Illness. Our goal is to increase awareness about the latest clinical research findings on tobacco and mental illness and to describe innova-

tive mental health program approaches to addressing tobacco dependence. We welcome questions and comments. In addition, the Tobacco Dependence Program is available to help your mental health program address tobacco.

Tobacco Dependence is known to be common among individuals with mental illness. However, the new data that 42% of cigarettes smoked in the US are by the mentally ill is still an eye-opener and should be a call to seriously address tobacco in mental health treatment settings. Smoking is associated with more frequent hospitalizations, higher rates of other substance use disorders, and increased death and illness among individuals with mental illness. Some disorders have especially high rates, for example, schizophrenia (88%) and mania (70%). Within such illness, smoking seems to be strongly correlated with the severity of illness. People with mental illness smoke more and inhale deeper and thus are at greater risk to the adverse effects of cigarette smoking than the general population.

A recent study on schizophrenia and tobacco dependence treatment, from the Yale University group where Dr. Ziedonis initially developed a Tobacco Dependence and Mental Health Clinical and Research Program, and where Dr. Tony George continues to develop new research initiatives provides hope that treating tobacco dependence in individuals with schizophrenia can work. This study found that treatment was about 3 times more effective when a patient is given Nicotine Replacement Therapy and is receiving one of the new atypical antipsychotic medications compared to the traditional medications. This study was published in the American Journal of Psychiatry in November 2000—Nicotine Transdermal Patch and Atypical Antipsychotic Medications for Smoking Cessation in Schizophrenia by Tony George, Doug Ziedonis, Alan Feingold, et al. Patients who had been taking the newer "atypical" antipsychotics, especially risperidone and olanzapine, had much higher abstinence rates (55.6%) than patients on typical antipsychotic medications (22.2%). Endpoint smoking cessation rates in patients who received atypical agents approached those observed in studies of the effects of the nicotine transdermal patch in smokers who were not psychiatric patients. These findings are in agreement with previous anecdotal reports that indicate a benefit of atypical antipsychotics in substance dependence. Previous studies with clozapine, an atypical antipsychotic, have also shown an improvement in smoking cessation rates. In future columns, we will present other recent research and updates on model mental health treatment program approaches that address tobacco dependence.

Forty-two percent of all cigarettes purchased in the US are purchased by individuals with mental illness! JAMA, November 2000

Consultation Help: The Tobacco Dependence Program, formerly the *Addressing Tobacco Project*, has expanded to provide services to NJ Mental Health programs to help them treat tobacco use by mental health consumers. The program's consultation services are free to NJ mental health programs. The Tobacco Dependence Program views tobacco use as an addiction and one that needs to be treated through an integrated approach. The treatment of tobacco dependence is best accomplished through a public health integration model, in which the treatment is incorporated into an agency's current modalities and delivery of services. Individuals with mental illness, and particularly people with severe and persistent mental illness, have historically been overlooked as recipients of tobacco dependence treatment.

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Website Review: www.nj.quitnet.com

One of the new services which has been funded by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (via the Master Settlement Agreement) to help smokers quit is an internet site (www.nj.quitnet.com). The site attempts to bring proven scientific methods to the Web to deliver support to smokers whenever they need it. So what can you or your clients expect when logging on to this site?

One of the great advantages of the New Jersey Quitnet site is that it contains a number of interactive and personalized services. An example of this is the peer-to-peer support page that uses a "chat-room" format to allow hundreds of people, who are trying to quit, talk to and encourage each other. When you click onto this page and read the comments and responses of other smokers who are going through the same experience as you, it really has the feeling of an on-line support group. If you want to ask your fellow quitters a question or encourage someone else, then this page enables you to do so.

Another page on the site enables you to ask questions directly to one of the quitnet's expert counselors. Again you simply post your question on the site, and you should get a reply later that day. It is

also very instructive to read the questions and answers already posted, as very often other smokers have had the same experiences and have asked the same questions.

In addition to these interactive components, the site has a number of other informative components, such as a review of pharmaceutical aids for stopping smoking, a quitting guide, and a directory of face-to-face services available in New Jersey.

I found the site to be user friendly, containing reliable high quality advice and information. I happily recommend it to smokers who are thinking of quitting, and I usually emphasize the importance of registering on the site, rather than just browsing. To register you have to type in some very simple pieces of personal information, which are guaranteed to be confidential. You then get an ID number which enables access to more of the interactive features of the site. An example here is the "Q Gadget", which automatically calculates the amount of life-time and money you have saved since quitting and informs you of this every time you log in. Overall this is an excellent site which is well worth a visit.

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