

The Nicotine Challenger

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A View From The Director *by Jonathan Foulds, PhD*

Expect more quitting for financial reasons

No-one reading this will be unaware of the economic crisis currently affecting the United States and the world. Very few people are fortunate enough to escape its effects via loss of earnings, loss of a job, or just reduced job security. As a result, most families are tightening their purse strings and looking to cut out unnecessary spending. We are already seeing signs that many are looking to cut out tobacco. Our tobacco dependence clinic has already noticed a marked increase in patient volume, particularly from people on low incomes. We have also noticed that a high proportion of our patients have been trying to save money by "butting out," meaning that they extinguish a cigarette after a few puffs and put it back in their pack for later smoking.

On February 4th, 2009, President Obama signed legislation designed to provide health insurance to uninsured children in low-income families, which will be funded by a 62 cent increase in the federal cigarette tax per pack. This will increase the federal cigarette tax from 39 cents to just over a dollar per pack. The federal tax per packet of "little cigars" is also increasing to the same level (\$1.01 per pack). In fact, the federal tax on all types of tobacco is increasing, with some (e.g. roll-your-own tobacco) increasing by a factor of 20! This is the first time there has been a national increase in cigarette or other tobacco taxes for over a decade. Although the tobacco companies typically try to reduce the initial impact of such increases by offering temporary discounts, it will inevitably lead to an overall increase in the cost to the smoker per pack of cigarettes. This increase in federal cigarette taxes is in addition to increases in state and city cigarette taxes that are also sweeping the country. Here in New Jersey, Governor Corzine has recently proposed an increase in state cigarette taxes in addition to the approved federal increase. This means that the cost per pack in New Jersey and New York will soon be well over \$7 and more likely in the \$8-\$10 range, and the cheaper products that many poor smokers had previously switched to (e.g. little cigars or roll-your-own) will also now be more expensive.

Whichever way you look at it, its going to become much more expensive to be a tobacco user. Think it can't possibly become more expensive? Spare a thought for smokers in Ireland, where a pack of cigarettes costs the equivalent of \$10. We've clearly got some catching up to do here in the United States; but the good news is that the combination of a very weak economy plus more expensive tobacco will be the tipping point resulting in many smokers trying to quit. As we know that many are highly addicted, we expect many more to seek treatment from smoking cessation services.

Butting Out: The Latest Unhealthy Alternative to Quitting

by Michelle T. Bover, MPH

As cigarette prices rise in a struggling economy, many smokers are looking for ways to cut costs. At our Quitcenter, we have experienced a surge in patient volume over the past several months, as many smokers are motivated to quit by the rising costs of tobacco. Of course, by



smoking fewer cigarettes per day, one spends fewer dollars on cigarettes. In fact, most of our newer patients have arrived at the Clinic having already cut down the number of cigarettes they smoke each day in effort to save money on cigarettes. Normally, smoking 10 cigarettes per day instead of 20

might imply a lower addiction to nicotine; however, we are quickly seeing that this is not the case for many of our new patients.

To save money on cigarettes, many smokers have adopted a behavior known locally as "butting out." Rather than smoking fewer times per day, many smokers are smoking half of a cigarette, extinguishing it, then re-lighting it later. By 'butting out', a pack-a-day smoker can still light up 20 times a day while cutting his or her cigarette expenses in half.

Along with money saved, however, there is the misconception that 'butting out' is healthier because one is smoking fewer cigarettes overall. In fact, there are a variety of "cigarette savers" on the market that promote 'butting out' as a healthy alternative to smoking full cigarettes and a way to decrease addiction to nicotine. In reality, smokers who butt out also smoke soon after waking each morning and many wake at night to smoke, indicating a high level of addiction. They also have high expired carbon monoxide (CO) readings, which undermines the supposed health benefits of 'butting out'.

What does this mean for us? As health educators, we need to raise awareness that 'butting out' is NOT a safe way to cut costs. As tobacco treatment specialists and healthcare professionals, we must be aware that cigarettes per day alone cannot effectively gauge a smoker's level of addiction. A 10-per-day smoker lighting up 20 or more times each day is likely to be just as addicted as the traditional pack-a-day smoker. Knowing this, we should follow every question about cigarettes per day with one about 'butting out', and must consider both responses - along with other indicators of dependence, for that matter - when deciding on a treatment plan.