

# Remembering Nicotine Replacement Therapy

by Michael B. Steinberg, MD, MPH

In the stampede to use the latest and "greatest" cessation medication to hit the market, Chantix (varenicline), the benefit and usefulness of nicotine medications (or nicotine replacement therapy) has fallen out of favor. However, it is important to remember that latest does not necessarily mean "greatest" for everyone, and, in spite of this enticing "Chantix buzz," we must not forget about NRT.

Nicotine medications, having been available for over 20 years now, have been well-researched and have established a long track record of use. By using nicotine medications, as opposed to bupropion or varenicline, to treat tobacco dependence, no new substances are introduced into a smoker's body. In fact, nicotine medications typically provide much less nicotine than most tobacco products, but without the dangerous chemicals. Despite these facts, there remains a misperception that nicotine causes the numerous health effects of smoking. To combat this common myth when first meeting a smoker for treatment, we like to clearly establish a few facts so they can make an informed decision about cessation medications:

1. The 4000+ toxins in tobacco smoke - not nicotine - are the cause of the many health consequences of tobacco use.
2. Nicotine's primary role is as the addictive substance in tobacco products.
3. Nicotine withdrawal accounts for the cravings and withdrawal symptoms after quitting, and cessation medications are designed to lessen these symptoms.
4. If you reduce withdrawal symptoms during a quit attempt, you will feel more comfortable and will be more likely to succeed.

Even beyond these, there is a great deal of confusion regarding the use of nicotine medications. These are fostered by public

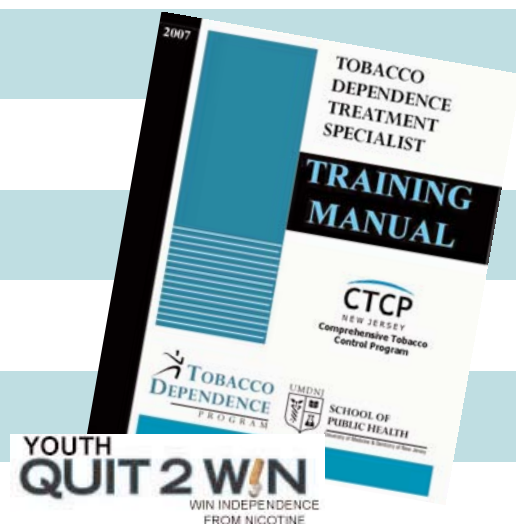
perception (e.g., if you smoke with the patch on you will explode) and by package labeling (e.g., do not combine this nicotine product with other nicotine products). These beliefs are contrary to the evidence-based data we have on the use of these medications. Specifically, recent publications have called for a new perspective on how we use nicotine medications (Kozlowski, et al., 2007). These "new" ideas include reminding smokers that:

1. Nicotine medications are much safer than smoking.
2. Nicotine medications are not "magic bullets", but can help you quit.
3. Use nicotine medications for as long as you feel it necessary in order to maintain independence from tobacco.
4. One dose does not fit all - depending on your own circumstances, you may need more or less nicotine medication(s), which may include combining medications.

The truth of the matter is that tobacco dependence is a chronic condition, and so we should consider its treatment in the same sense as we do for other chronic conditions. For example, we commonly use combination pharmacotherapy in the treatment of diabetes and hypertension, so why not for tobacco dependence? We usually prescribe medications for diabetes and hypertension on a long-term basis...why not for tobacco dependence? Certainly, tobacco dependence leads to as much, if not more, death and disease as these other processes. Furthermore, our healthcare system's reimbursement activities should also mirror those of traditional medical care, providing for state-of-the-art treatment (including combinations of medications) for as long as is necessary to achieve the desired clinical outcome. We may still have a ways to go in universally establishing tobacco dependence as a chronic condition, but through treatment and education, we can each help achieve this goal.

## 2008 Training Schedule

Mar. 7-8	<b>Treating Tobacco Dependence in Mental Health Settings:</b> A two-day CME Training Conference for Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Advanced Practice Nurses and Other Mental Health Professionals
Mar. 11	One Day Training - The Latest on Stopping Smoking
Mar. 31-Apr 4	Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training
Jun. 16-20	Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training
Jul. 28-30	2-Day Youth Quit2Win Training
Sept. 22-26	Certified Tobacco Treatment Specialist Training
Oct. 20-21	2-Day Youth Quit2Win Training



For details, registration, and current schedules visit [www.tobaccoprogram.org](http://www.tobaccoprogram.org), call (732) 235-8212 or email [info@tobaccoprogram.org](mailto:info@tobaccoprogram.org)