

Stubbing out Smoking in the Community

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Introduction

Smoking is the single greatest avoidable cause of disease and death on earth. It is responsible for five million deaths each year globally. The World Health Organisation projects that half the world population who smoke today – that is about 650 million people – will eventually be killed by tobacco. Half of them will die during their most productive middle age (35-69 years).¹ The disease burden will be born largely by low and middle-income countries where eight out of ten smokers reside,² and will further widen the global wealth and health inequality.

The Threat of Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is also a major public health threat. In the latest Surgeon General Report "The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke" issued in July 2006, the US CDC considered that the evidence is sufficient to infer a causal relationship between exposure to secondhand smoke and increased risks of coronary heart disease morbidity and mortality among men and women, and the pooled relative risks from meta-analyses indicate a 25-30 percent increase in the risk of coronary heart diseases from exposure to secondhand smoke.³

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The Global Concerted Efforts on Tobacco Control

With the concerted efforts of dedicated tobacco control advocates worldwide, many countries all over the world are taking a stand against tobacco by supporting the world's first international public health treaty – the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Up to now, 140 countries have ratified the Treaty. The People's Republic of China ratified FCTC on 11 October 2005, and Hong Kong SAR has passed the Amendments of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap.371) in October 2006, in accordance to the FCTC. The amendments of the Ordinance include (i) expansion of the scope of statutory no smoking areas; (ii) health warnings of tobacco products, (iii) advertisement and sales of tobacco, and (iv) law enforcement aspects. The Hong Kong legislature has contributed to the global alliance to implement the FCTC and to reduce tobacco consumption.

The Special Role of Cardiologists

The health professionals have special roles and missions to avert the tobacco epidemic. Clinicians, especially cardiologists are at the forefront of the tobacco battle, their important role can be captured in the acronym HEART.

H - helping patients to quit. Approximately 70% of all tobacco users admit that they would like to quit eventually. Simple advice from a physician has been shown to increase

abstinence rates significantly (by 30%) compared to no advice.⁴

- E - educating patients, the public and the next generation of health professionals on the harm of tobacco.
- A - advocacy for changes at societal level.
- R - role modeling for patients and other medical disciplines.
- T - teaming up at personal and organization level and teaming up of discipline – from clinical, epidemiology and to evidence-based public health policy.

References

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