Tobacco-Cessation Help in the Workplace

Smoking and other forms of tobacco use are the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accounting for approximately 443,000 deaths, or about 1 of every 5, each year.

The CDC’s National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion notes an estimated 49,000 of those tobacco-related deaths result from secondhand smoke exposure. Tobacco use causes cancer, coronary heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) including chronic bronchitis and emphysema, and increases the risk of stroke by 2 to 4 times.

The consequences of tobacco use have dire implications for the overall health of Americans and the U.S. health care system, in terms of their burden on the country’s medical resources and their financial direct and indirect costs. Cigarette smoking alone costs the country more than $193 billion in lost productivity and direct healthcare expenditures, and another $10 billion in secondhand smoke-related healthcare expenses.

“You’ll reap tremendous benefits whenever you quit, but... the sooner you quit, the better off you’ll be,” says Dr. Tim McAfee, director of the Office on Smoking and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Opportunities in the workplace

The good news is that there are opportunities to prevent and reduce tobacco-related diseases by addressing the problem in the workplace, where 139 million Americans spend about a third of any given day. With their workers spending an average of 40 hours a week on the job, employers have a unique opportunity to
help foster a healthier workforce by creating a tobacco-free, health-conscious work environment, as well as by encouraging and helping their employees to succeed in quitting tobacco use. These steps offer several benefits to employers, as well.

Studies have indicated that maintaining a healthy workforce can lower direct costs, such as insurance premiums and worker’s compensation claims, as well as indirect costs like employee productivity, absenteeism and “presenteeism,” that is, when employees come to work suffering from physical or mental health problems that prevent them from working at their full potential.

The National Healthy Worksite Program

A new CDC initiative, the National Healthy Worksite Program, is making it much easier for about 115 small, medium and large-sized employers across the country to adopt workplace health improvement programs that can address tobacco use and other related chronic conditions. The program’s lessons can be applied in broader employer communities across the nation. The NHWP includes assessment of employees’ health and risk for chronic diseases; plans for the development of evidence-based interventions that give employees opportunities for professional health coaching and tobacco-cession assistance, as well as a ban on tobacco use at the worksite; assistance in coordinating community support; and evaluation of progress.

Some other things employers can do to encourage their employees to take advantage of available smoking-cession programs or services are:

- Inform employees about their health insurance coverage that include tobacco cessation medication and counseling
  - Promote covered FDA-approved prescription tobacco cessation medications, including nicotine replacement
  - Promote covered tobacco cessation counseling
- Refer tobacco users to a state or other tobacco cessation telephone quit line.

Other recent CDC matte articles and resources on impact of tobacco use:

*Smoking and Tobacco Use Fast Facts*
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fast_facts/index.htm#toll

*Tobacco-Use contributions to Heart Disease and Stroke*
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/health_effects/heart_disease/index.htm

*Stroke Risk Factors*
http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/risk_factors.htm
How to Prevent Stroke
http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/what_you_can_do.htm

Tobacco Control Programs
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/index.htm

Smoking Cessation
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/cessation/quit/index.htm

For additional information about the National Healthy Worksite Program, check out our [website](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/index.htm) or email us at NationalHealthyWork@cdc.gov

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