

With training, friends and family can help loved ones quit tobacco

February 5 2014, by Katherine Kahn



Today, one in five people in the U.S. smokes tobacco. Traditionally, doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers have been the ones to deliver smoking cessation messages. A new study in the *American Journal of Health Behavior* finds that simple training in effective smoking cessation strategies can motivate anyone—even those without a medical background—to encourage their friends, family and acquaintances to stop smoking.

"People are concerned about their own health and their loved ones' health," says lead study author Myra Muramoto, M.D. of the University of Arizona Department of Family and Community Medicine. "They might want to help a loved one quit [tobacco](#), but a lot of times they don't

know what to do."

To address this issue, Muramoto and her colleagues designed both a Web-based and in-person training program for people who want to help others quit tobacco. The trainings focused not only on facts about tobacco use, says Muramoto, but also how to effectively get the message across—without nagging or confrontation. "We put a lot of emphasis on communication strategies and building empathy," she says. "If someone has not struggled with [tobacco addiction](#) themselves they may not understand why someone can't just quit."

Researchers then recruited 898 people from the general public to test the effectiveness of the programs in motivating participants to encourage tobacco cessation in others. Participants were enrolled in the Web-based training, the in-person training or in a group that only received mailed materials on smoking cessation.

The study found that more than 80 percent of participants in each group reported discussing tobacco cessation with someone who used tobacco in the previous 3 months, and over 70 percent had done so in the previous month—even those participants who only received mailings.

"This was really a surprise to us," Muramoto says. "We didn't expect that people who got pamphlets in the mail would really do anything. That speaks to their level of motivation to help loved ones quit tobacco."

However, the study did find that people who received either the Web-based or in-person training were more knowledgeable about [tobacco cessation](#) and were more confident discussing it than people who only received mailings.

Norman Edelman, M.D., senior medical advisor for the American Lung Association, remarked that the study "shows quite clearly that you can

train people [without medical knowledge] to deliver informative messages. A brief [training](#), when it's structured, does improve knowledge about smoking cessation, and more importantly, results in people delivering a [smoking cessation](#) message more often. To me, that is useful."

More information: Muramoto ML, Hall, JR, Nichter M, et al. "Activating lay health influencers to promote tobacco cessation." *Am J Health Behav*. 2014;38(3):392-403. DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.38.3.8](https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.38.3.8)

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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