

Effective protection for non-smokers could prevent 30% of all cancer deaths

May 24 2016



31st May 2016 is World No Tobacco Day

Every year, lung cancer causes around 1.6 million deaths worldwide. 70% of all lung cancer patients throughout the world are smokers or ex-smokers and, in Central Europe, this figure is higher than 80%. Smoking is therefore regarded as the central risk factor for this disease. On occasion of World No Tobacco Day (31st May 2016) Robert Pirker, cancer expert from the Comprehensive Cancer Center (CCC) at MedUni Vienna and Vienna General Hospital, is therefore calling for improved protection for non-smokers and redoubled efforts in the area of smoking prevention.

For oncologist Robert Pirker, prevention and protection of non-smokers are key strategies in the fight against [lung cancer](#). Pirker: "The statistics speak for themselves: last century, smoking-related diseases led to more than 100 million deaths. In this sense, smoking is responsible for more victims than all the wars over the same period taken together. If there is no radical change in worldwide smoking behaviour, we will see more than 1 billion smoking-related deaths this century."

Smoking is therefore a huge problem for our society and we need to tackle it head-on, says the MedUni Vienna expert. According to [dontsmoke.at](#), an initiative run by experts from the Austrian Society of Haematology & Medical Oncology (OeGHO), Austria is lagging behind in Europe when it comes to controlling tobacco and protecting non-smokers. Pirker: "There is a lack of political will in Austria and the public are not prepared to establish consistent measures. Establishing smoke-free areas in pubs and restaurants or putting warnings on packs of cigarettes are merely first steps in the right direction."

If the expert were to have his way, there would be a general ban on smoking in pubs and restaurants. Moreover, the price of tobacco products would have to be increased significantly and public awareness raised about the health risks and financial disadvantages of smoking. There is also a need to improve legislation to protect minors.

Quitting smoking is always worthwhile

However, alongside prevention, Pirker advises all smokers to quit. International studies show that it makes good sense to stop smoking, no matter what your age. In this context, Pirker refers to the United Kingdom Million Women Study. This scientific study showed that women who smoke have a 25x greater risk of developing cancer than those who don't. Even if they quit smoking at the age of 50, their risk falls to 6x that of a non-smoker. Pirker: "Although the diagnostic

procedures and treatments available to us are constantly improving, it is even better not to start smoking in the first place or, at least, to give it up again as soon as possible."

With this in mind, MedUni Vienna and Vienna General Hospital are therefore taking action, such as offering smoking cessation treatment to employees and banning [smoking](#) in their buildings.

Provided by Medical University of Vienna

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