

Team develops new tool to help psychiatrists encourage patients to quit smoking

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Psychiatrists often disregard their patients' smoking even though tobacco use accounts for 50 percent of deaths among people with mental illness, a Rutgers-led study finds.

The researchers developed a web-based [training program](#) for psychiatry residents on how to assess and intervene with [tobacco addiction](#) in patients, according to the study in *The American Journal on Addictions*.

"Teaching psychiatry residents is a great way to change this national problem," said lead author Jill M. Williams, director of the Division of Addiction Psychiatry at Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. "We know psychiatrists and behavioral health providers are not doing enough, and teaching the next generation of providers is an important step in increasing access to [tobacco](#) treatment services. This study shows that the live educational activities we have been delivering to professionals for years can be modified to a webinar format to reach bigger audiences like psychiatry residents."

The [online course](#) was completed by 152 psychiatric residents at 42 medical schools, many of whom knew little about tobacco use disorder. Many falsely believed that smoking cessation interferes with a patient's ability to recover from other types of addiction despite substantial evidence to the contrary.

Before taking the course, many residents noted other obstacles that prevent psychiatrists from addressing patients' tobacco use. For example, patients with severe mental health issues have more immediate problems to address; many patients are not motivated to quit; and it is difficult for psychiatrists to find training in this area. After taking the course, however, the residents demonstrated a high level of knowledge about tobacco use disorder and ways they can help patients to quit smoking. The residents also reported feeling more motivated and prepared to address [patients'](#) tobacco use.

Williams said the course is easy to implement, comprising three one-hour sessions with direct links to additional resources and source materials. It is based on live continuing education trainings that the

research group has conducted for behavioral health professionals since 2006, with topics derived from U.S. Public Health Service guidelines for clinical practitioners.

"Online training is ideal for introducing this type of instruction to graduate medical education across the globe, especially for an area that has been neglected in [psychiatry](#) and for which there are few skilled instructors," Williams said.

More information: Jill M. Williams et al, Evaluation of an Online Residency Training in Tobacco Use Disorder, *The American Journal on Addictions* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/ajad.12885](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajad.12885)

Provided by Rutgers University

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