

Tobacco Use, Prevention, and Cessation: Introduction to the Special Section

John C. Greene, D.M.D., M.P.H.

Dr. Greene is Dean Emeritus of the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry and Chair of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) ad hoc Committee on Tobacco. He served as moderator of the symposium, held March 9, 2002, in San Diego, CA. Direct correspondence to him at 103 Peacock Drive, San Rafael, CA 94901-1551; 415-457-2207 phone; 415-457-2207 fax; jgreene@itsa.ucsf.edu.

Every year the use of tobacco takes a tremendous toll on the world's population in terms of illness and death, even almost forty years after the first report of the U.S. Surgeon General on Smoking and Health.¹ That earth-shaking report set in motion a major assault on this worldwide public health problem. Yet the tobacco industry continues to be remarkably successful in its efforts to recruit new users and maintain their addictions despite all efforts to the contrary. In the United States alone it is anticipated that there will be more than 400,000 tobacco-related deaths this year, and worldwide more than 4 million are expected to die this year from the use of tobacco.² Further, it has been estimated that the number of deaths worldwide will more than double in the next twenty years.² The Director General of the World Health Organization has placed high priority on doing something about this tragic situation.³ This challenge to the public's health will require dedicated and sustained efforts from all of us in the health care arena if this wasteful loss of life is to be avoided. During these forty years since the surgeon general's wakeup call, much has been learned about the health effects of tobacco use and approaches to overcoming nicotine addiction. However application of that knowledge continues to be far too limited.

There is a growing body of information about the significant adverse impact the use of tobacco has on oral health. Moreover, there is increasing recognition that dentists and hygienists not only need to deal with the oral health consequences of tobacco use, but they also have an opportunity and indeed a responsibility to get involved in its prevention and

provide assistance with cessation.⁴ While much has been learned, much more research is needed into the basic science, clinical, and behavioral aspects of this problem so that we in dentistry can become better prepared to do our part in helping to reduce the tremendous harm being wrought on the world population today by the tobacco industry.

It was toward that end that the International Association for Dental Research (IADR) ad hoc Committee on Tobacco sponsored a symposium on tobacco use, prevention, and cessation in March 2002 in San Diego. The committee has representatives from Japan, Singapore, India, Africa, Sweden, Denmark, and the United States. Symposium cosponsors were the International Federation of Dental Education Associations and the Behavioral Sciences and Health Services Research and the Oral Health Research groups of the IADR.

The IADR Committee on Tobacco was established "To work with other international dental and related health organizations to develop an action plan (for IADR) to discourage the promotion and marketing of tobacco use, especially in developing countries." The proposed action plan included: "Gather information about the current state of the science related to the oral and systemic health effects of tobacco use and its prevention and cessation and identify research priorities" and "Study the role of the practicing dental profession (including dental hygienists and assistants) related to prevention and cessation of tobacco use."

The following papers in this special section were presented at the IADR symposium on Tobacco Use, Prevention, and Cessation held March 2002 in San Diego. They document what current research tells us about what dental and medical providers and community-based programs can do to reduce the use of tobacco. The concluding paper challenges us to accomplish more by expanding our current efforts to reduce the use of tobacco through education, policy, practice, and research.

REFERENCES

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