Time to stub out

Helping smokers quit

Pages 2 & 3
Help for a smoke-free life

Personal motivation, family support and de-normalising the habit all contribute to helping smokers quit, writes Meera Murugesan.

To deal with a smoker is tough. We put up with their brain-dulled smoke, their refusal to seek help and their unwillingness to even admit they have a problem. Yet, believe it or not, it is even tougher for a smoker who wants to quit. One in two people who use tobacco will die from its effects, yet millions continue to light up despite these staggering odds. It is reflective of how deep and dangerous this addiction is.

To understand and accept that they are in the grip of a devastating addiction and not merely a lifestyle habit, we will be better equipped to help them.

HELP STRUGGLE
The 2011 Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) points out that 66 per cent of smokers attempt to quit, without any assistance and on average, smokers make around 6 attempts before they succeed.

The journey to quitting is an extremely difficult and frustrating one, given that nicotine is one of the most addictive substances known to man. Quitting is challenging, both on physical and psychological levels, says Dr Amer Sidding, a psychiatrist and smoking cessation specialist at the UMMC Specialist Centre.

Smokers know the habit is bad but at the same time, they want it comfort and pleasure. We need to understand and address this fact because only then will we be more supportive in our efforts to help them.

He says: “Quitting is easy but sustained quitting is really difficult. It’s not just important to help people quit but also to ensure they do not slip back up again.”

MULTI-FACETED APPROACH
Dr Amer is keen that family support and involvement have been shown to be very important factors in helping smokers quit.

However, family members must be able to take a supportive, non-critical and non-judgmental approach in order to assist the smoker.

For many men, life-altering misfortunes like marriage or the birth of a child can be a motivation to quit, so such events can be used to encourage them to start on it.

Some men may begin reducing the number of their cigarettes during their wife’s pregnancy and stop altogether when the child is born because they want to set a good example for their child. Poor pressure can also play a role. While most smokers take up smoking as teenagers or young adults due to peer pressure, later on, when they see their friends being responsible and trying to quit, they, too, could be driven to do the same.

For men in particular, role models play a huge role in changing their behaviour.

Dr Amer says smokers must also be made aware that smoking cessation services are available and that they don’t have to struggle on their own if they want to quit. We cannot but assist smokers who want to quit, knowing where to seek help. They have to be informed.

CESSATION SERVICES
There are over 450 Ministry of Health quit-smoking clinics nationwide where smokers will be assessed and assisted through various stages of quitting. Treatment includes the use of drugs, psychological support and counselling.

Dr Amer says smokers can also turn to their general practitioners, pharmacist or any healthcare provider for advice and help.

“It’s crucial that we get the message across to smokers that there are treatments and services available to help them quit,” he says.

Expression of non-smoking urges can play a role in helping smokers quit.
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LIFE & TIMES

HEALTH

Tobacco use in Malaysia

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<tr>
<th>TOBACCO SMOKERS</th>
<th>MEN (%)</th>
<th>WOMEN (%)</th>
<th>OVERALL (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current tobacco smokers</td>
<td>43.9</td>
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<td>Daily tobacco smokers</td>
<td>39.9</td>
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<td>Occasional tobacco smokers</td>
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<td>Current cigarette smokers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily cigarette smokers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasional cigarette smokers</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Former daily tobacco smokers (among ever smokers)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Former daily tobacco smokers (among ever daily smokers)</td>
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SMOKELESS TOBACCO USERS

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<th>SMOKELESS TOBACCO USERS</th>
<th>MEN (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Current smokeless tobacco users</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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SMOKING-CESSION FIGURES IN MALAYSIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>MEN (%)</th>
<th>WOMEN (%)</th>
<th>OVERALL (%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smokers who made an attempt to quit in past 12 months</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>48.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smokers who planned to or were thinking about quitting within the next 12 months</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smokers advised to quit by a healthcare provider in the past 12 months</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SAPS, 2011

STRATEGIES TO KICK THE HABIT

STUDIES have shown that the likelihood of successfully quitting is greater if one utilizes goal-setting strategies to quit smoking. Setting realistic and measurable goals, building on past successes and rewarding oneself as one accomplishes each goal will help a person to achieve the ultimate aim of becoming smoke-free.

Understanding that Johnson & Johnson Malaysia has launched its new smoking cessation campaign called Do Something Amazing. This is expected to help smokers overcome tobacco dependence through the setting of an attainable goal which allows them to maintain focus and have more control over their quit attempts.

The campaign was in conjunction with the launch of Nicorette Invisi Patch, an improved nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) patch designed to help smokers fight cravings.

The over-the-counter product is a once-a-day solution that provides a controlled dose of nicotine for up to 16 hours to help smokers deal with nicotine cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

"We recognise that overcoming tobacco dependence is challenging and takes commitment, support and time," says Stuart Crab, country director of retail group for Johnson & Johnson Malaysia.

There is a need for medical intervention as some smokers are not successful in their attempts to quit. Evidence suggests that NRT increases a person’s ‘success’ rate by 30-50 per cent.

NRT temporarily replaces much of the nicotine from cigarettes to reduce the desire to smoke and nicotine withdrawal symptoms. This allows for a more ‘smooth’ quit attempt.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hifizah Sharifa (fourth from left) at the launch of the Do Something Amazing campaign.

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