The Star (Fit for Life), 31 May 2015

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TODAY, we celebrate World No Tobacco Day 2015, but how many smokers are actually going to give up puffing, even if just for a day? (Tell us, are you?)

With this year’s theme being “Tips To Kick Tobacco Before It’s Too Late: Tips For Tobacco Freedom”, by the World Health Organization (WHO), is calling on countries to work together to end the illicit trade of tobacco products as that market may account for as much as one in every five cigarettes consumed globally. It is a problem in both high-income and low-income countries.

And cut smoking can be very difficult journey as smokers have to cope with withdrawal symptoms, including irritability, frustration, anger, anxiety, increased appetite and difficulty concentrating.

“Most smokers can not control their desire to take a puff. Quitting smoking is a process that is challenging on both psychological and physiological grounds. Sometimes quitting might be easy, but to sustain it is difficult. Sometimes quitting might be easy, but to sustain it is difficult. Sometimes quitting might be easy, but to sustain it is difficult.”

Smokers need to understand that nicotine addiction is a medical condition and they need to seek help from their physicians to successfully overcome tobacco dependence,” said associate professor Dr Ainer Siddi Amor Norri, consultant psychiatrist and nicotine addiction specialist at Universiti Malaya.

He was speaking at the recent launch of Johnson & Johnson’s Something Amazing campaign to encourage smokers to kick their habit through setting an achievable goal.

Dr Amer’s colleague, Universiti Malaya associate professor and respiratory physician, Dr Hadijah Mohd, said, “The tobacco industry is a formidable foe, so much so that the top six companies’ profits in 2013 surpassed Malaysia’s gross domestic product (GDP).

“Smoking is a highly dangerous and lethal addiction, yet 65% of men prefer to spend money on cigarettes rather than on household goods. In terms of tobacco-related healthcare costs, the government spent almost RM4.4 billion (2010 statistic) to treat inpatient heart disease, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease,” he revealed.

The Global Adult Tobacco Survey carried out in Malaysia in 2011 showed that 43.9% of women and 23.1% of all Malaysian currently smoked tobacco. The success of quitting is only 18%.

Dr Hadijah said, “The incidence of female smoking is lower because women are more aware of their healthcare. For men, it is a much thing they don’t want.”

According to WHO, the tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing nearly six million people a year.

“More than five million of these deaths are the result of direct tobacco use, while more than 650,000 people die from non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke. Approximately one person dies every six seconds due to tobacco, accounting for one in 10 adult deaths, and up to half of current users will eventually die of a tobacco-related disease.

Studies show that few people understand the specific health risks of tobacco use. For example, a 2009 survey in China revealed that only 36% of smokers know that smoking causes coronary heart disease and only 7% knew that it causes stroke.

Among smokers who are aware of the dangers of tobacco, most want to quit but don’t know where to go for help.

Counselling and medication can more than double the chance that a smoker who tries to quit will succeed.

“We have to help those in denial, so awareness is important. It can lead to mental health problems. We always assume they know where to find help but it’s really not that easy,” said Dr Amer.

“You can go for all kinds of therapy, but you have to be willing to change, or else it won’t work. Relapse is a common thing, so you have to motivate yourself through affirmations. Don’t blame it on the cigarette — light up the candle and do something,” said Dr Amer.

Dr Amer added, “We can use football as a tool for social development. If you want to educate the players, you’ve got to catch them young, especially between ages of 12 and 14, when they pick up the smoking habit.”

Often times, players are not aware of the dangers of smoking as they’re still young. Only later does it affect their performance and performance.

On the use of electric cigarettes to quit smoking, Dr Amer said it was still a controversial subject as there is not enough scientific evidence to show it actually works.

“E-cigarettes contain other chemicals besides nicotine, which also get inhaled. Since we don’t know the actual content, it’s best to follow another method to quit.”