

'Too cool to smoke' campaign launches in November

Be Cancer Aware, one of South Africa's cancer information hubs, will be kicking off its second annual 'Too cool to smoke' campaign on 14 November 2013, as part of Lung Cancer Awareness Month. The aim of this initiative is to create awareness about tobacco addiction and the detrimental effect it has on the body. Tobacco kills at least 44 000 South Africans every year and 5.4 million people worldwide, 10% of which die from complications arising from second-hand smoke.



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By quitting even for a day, smokers will be taking an important step towards a healthier life - one that can lead to reducing cancer risk. The Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa shows that within two days of quitting, there is no nicotine left in the body and smell and taste begin to improve. Within two to 12 weeks, lung function improves by 30% and within 10 years, the risk of lung cancer halves compared to a smoker. After 15 years, one's risk of heart disease and stroke is almost identical to a non-smoker!

Non-smokers can also get involved and help promote the cause by donning their shades to work on 14 November and showing the world that they are 'too cool to smoke' and upload their photos to the Be Cancer Aware Facebook page to motivate others to do the same.

Serious health implications

Approximately one person dies every six seconds due to tobacco, which accounts for one in ten adult deaths worldwide. With this in mind, it is no wonder that research has shown a correlation between smoking and cancer, where at least 80% of all diagnoses of lung cancer are attributed to cigarette smoking.

Lung cancer and other respiratory problems can also affect non-smokers because there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco. Toxins from the cigarettes are able to enter the bloodstream and contribute to the thickening of artery walls, which accelerates the process of various heart and lung problems. Furthermore, studies illustrate that lung cancer is no longer a male-dominated disease - there has been an increase in female smokers, leading to a rise in the number of women who are developing this type of cancer as well.

Lung cancer can be extremely difficult to treat because most of the symptoms are not visible until the disease has progressed to an advanced stage. This means that by the time the cancer is found, it is usually too late to treat effectively and many of these patients have poor survival outcomes.

Awareness goes a long way

Smoking and tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of death globally. A recent survey from the Medical Research Council has published some shocking results - nearly half of Western Cape learners in grade 8 to 10 are currently smoking. Adding to this, research conducted for the 2008 National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey found that one fifth of South African high school learners are smokers. By illustrating that smoking is one of the most common risk factors for lung cancer and that the harmful substances in smoke can damage lung tissue, South Africa can lower these statistics.

According to Dr Georgia Demetriou, an oncologist at Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre, "The burden of lung cancer is high, but awareness of the disease is very low as compared with other diseases such as breast cancer. This is why it is important to get involved in awareness initiatives to help educate and inform people about this deadly disease, where early detection is key. Through increased awareness, together with advances in new treatments, patients can have a more informed and optimistic outlook upon diagnosis."

Smokers who feel they need a bit of help to quit can contact the National Council Against Smoking or the Cancer Association of South Africa. For more information, go to www.becanceraware.co.za.

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