



## *Nurses and Smoking: It's a Union Issue*

- ❖ Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke are occupational health and safety issues that are important to unions and their members. Tobacco smoke causes numerous health effects, including heart disease, stroke, and cancer, so reducing exposures at the worksite is critical for worker health.<sup>1</sup> There is a nationwide trend toward smokefree worksites, especially in the venues where nurses work.
- ❖ Although the majority of nurses don't smoke and many others have quit, smoking is still an important issue among nurses: 15% of Registered Nurses smoke; 28% of Licensed Practical Nurses smoke. These are higher rates of smoking than other health care professionals.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Nurses' unions are at the forefront of efforts to improve workers' health and lessen or end major sources of job-related hazards and stress for nurses. Under demanding working conditions, it is not surprising that nurses who smoke often describe trying to quit as stressful. Smoking cessation, then, is a part of the broader health and safety efforts of nurses' unions.
- ❖ Smoking is a workplace issue. Through their efforts on smoking cessation and worksite issues related to smoking, nurses' union can enhance their efforts to insure a healthy workforce in a healthy workplace. Unions can work to emphasize that all nurses, smokers and non-smokers, get their breaks during work shifts.
- ❖ Nurses' unions are in a unique position to provide leadership to support smoking cessation among their members by providing resources and support in quitting and in addressing worksite issues related to smoking.
- ❖ Unions are trusted sources of information for their members. Nurses' unions can provide their members information on cessation resources, such as the Tobacco Free Nurses Website, national and state quitlines, and other cessation resources.
- ❖ Nurses' unions can build support among members for those trying to quit. Smoking is a powerful addiction, and quitting can be a difficult process. Support by colleagues for those trying to quit increases success rates.<sup>3 4</sup>
- ❖ Nurses unions can also sponsor trainings to help nurses assist their patients to quit, being in the forefront of current trend to mandate smoking cessation counseling for all patients who smoke.
- ❖ As more worksites are becoming smokefree, nurses' unions can collectively bargain for smoking cessation treatment and financial coverage for it for their members. Ideally, this should include lifetime coverage for pharmacotherapy (for instance, 'the patch' and bupropion), counseling, and multiple quit attempts.<sup>5</sup>



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## RESOURCES

- Tobacco Free Nurses <http://www.tobaccofreenurses.org/>
- National Quitline 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669)
- The Organized Labor and Tobacco Control Network [www.laborandtobacco.org](http://www.laborandtobacco.org)
- Smoking Cessation Leadership Center <http://smokingcessationleadership.ucsf.edu/>
- Helping Smokers Quit: A Guide for Nurses [www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm](http://www.ahrq.gov/path/tobacco.htm).  
Call 1-800-358-9295 and identify yourself as a nurse to receive up to 100 free copies of the pocket guide.
- Nurses, Smoking, and the Workplace. Sarna, L, Bialous, SA, Wewers, ME, Froelicher, ES & Danao, L 2005, *Research in Nursing & Health*, 28, 79-90

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<sup>1</sup> **The Health Consequences of Smoking: A Report by the Surgeon General,**

<http://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/library/smokingconsequences/>.

<sup>2</sup> **2002-2002 Current Population Survey (CPS) Tobacco Use Supplement.**

<sup>3</sup> **Rowe, K. and J. Clark (1999).** Smoking behavior, initiating and cessation factors among Japanese nurses: a cohort study. *Public Health* 116(6): 347-52.

<sup>4</sup> **Kneeshaw, M. (1990).** Nurses' perceptions of co-worker responses to smoking cessation attempts. *J N Y State Nurses Assoc* 21(10): 9-13.

<sup>5</sup> **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Coverage for Tobacco Use Cessation Treatments,**  
[http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/educational\\_materials/cessation/ReimbursementBrochureFull.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/educational_materials/cessation/ReimbursementBrochureFull.pdf)