

General Practice: Brief advice & brief offers of cessation support

Frontline health care professionals (HCPs) have an important role to play in helping their patients who smoke to quit. Just raising the issue of smoking and making an offer of treatment will prompt people to make a quit attempt. The evidence base shows us that for every 40 people who smoke that are advised to quit, one will become a long-term ex-smoker. The chances of quitting can be further increased by recommending that people use a combination of behavioural support (e.g. text, telephone, or face-to-face) and smoking cessation medication.

We know that many HCPs feel that their patients don't listen to their advice and continue to smoke. However, it's not that most people want to continue to smoke but more that they struggle to quit. It may take some people several attempts before they finally succeed.

The ABC approach is about putting our emphasis on increasing volume where we are likely to have the greatest impact – and that is by encouraging more quit attempts. Don't give up helping your patients to give up.

What level of cessation support is required?

In response to queries regarding the level of quit support that General Practice is expected to provide, the Ministry encourages General Practice to focus on:

- A. *Asking if people smoke at least once a year*
- B. *Giving brief advice to quit to all identified smokers every time they present at General Practice, and then*
- C. *Referring patients, to their local stop smoking services or Quitline. Patients are 30% more likely to quit with medicines and face to face behavioral support*

We highly recommend when GP's are prescribing cessation meds, they also refer the patient into the local stop smoking service.

Practices may choose to provide more quit support through their own resources (follow-up phone calls, group-based treatment, walk-in clinics, additional face to face appointments etc).

The key thing is prompting people to make a quit attempt. Remember, 1 in every 40 people who smoke, will go on to quit for good, just because their GP or practice staff gives them brief advice.

A Real Life Example - from Dr Hayden McRobbie

In a real-life example, my father – who has been a smoker for 50 years – recently visited his GP, who helped him quit smoking.

My father had cut his thumb badly while sawing wood, which led him to the hospital emergency department (ED). The ED doctor asked him if he smoked – to which he replied he did. The doctor then followed on with some important advice. He explained that because he was a smoker, his thumb would not heal as quickly. Quitting smoking would assist the healing. As a builder, my father's livelihood depends on his ability to use his hand, and the hand he hurt was the hand he uses to hold his hammer. Not only did the ED doctor give advice to quit, he went on to ask if he would like help to quit – to which my father said yes.

The doctor offered him NRT but having used it previously, he had found that it did not work very well for him. The doctor suggested he visit his GP, who could offer him other smoking cessation products. He visited his GP the very next day.

My father's GP prescribed Bupropion (Zyban) which he used for a 3 month period. There were a few slip ups along the way but overall he found Zyban really helped alleviate his cravings and he has now been smokefree since January of this year.

Having a son who is a doctor and a specialist in the area of tobacco dependence and smoking cessation, as well as a supportive family who have always encouraged him to quit, the desire to quit was always there. However, being dependent on nicotine, it was never just as easy as 'giving up'.

The tailored advice provided by the ED doctor was the catalyst in my father's journey to becoming smokefree. The support from his GP has helped him maintain his new smokefree life.

After years of me trying to assist my father to quit I am 'over the moon' with this real life example of how the ABC approach has made a difference for my family, as I am sure it has for many others.