

Short communication

## Anti-smoking campaign in Multan, Pakistan

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حملة مكافحة التدخين في ملتان، باكستان

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**الخلاصة:** يمثل التدخين مشكلة صحية خطيرة، ولاسيما في الشباب. وتتناول هذه الدراسة بالوصف حملة لمكافحة التدخين استهدفت طلاب كلية طب نشتار وجامعة بهاء الدين زكريا في مدينة ملتان. وكان الهدف من الحملة الدعوة إلى ممارسة الرياضة وإلى الإقلاع عن التدخين، وذلك من خلال مشاركة المجتمع واستنهاضه. وقد تم اعتماد استراتيجية إعلامية مختلطة، وإعداد مواد إعلامية وتثقيفية. كما عُقدت حلقة دراسية لتقديم معلومات عن التدخين، ومخاطره، واستراتيجيات الإقلاع عنه، وتبادل الخبرات حوله. وعقب الحلقة الدراسية نُظمت مباراة في الكريكت بين الطلاب، تم أثناءها توزيع مزيد من النشرات وعرض عدد من الشعارات. وقد حقق هذا النشاط نجاحاً مشهوداً، إذ نجح في استنهاض المجتمع وتوصيل رسالة مكافحة التدخين. ويمكن الاستفادة من مثل هذه المناسبات في تعزيز قضايا أخرى ذات علاقة بأنماط الحياة.

**ABSTRACT** Smoking is a serious public health concern, particularly among young people. This communication describes an anti-smoking campaign targeted at the students of Nishtar Medical College and Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan. The aim was to promote sports and discourage smoking through community participation and mobilization. A mixed media strategy was adopted and information and education materials were developed. A seminar was held giving information on smoking, its hazards, quitting strategies and experiences. This was followed by a cricket match played between the students at which further brochures were distributed and slogans displayed. The activity was very successful and succeeded in mobilizing the community and putting over the anti-smoking message. Such events could be used to promote other issues related to lifestyle.

### Campagne antitabac à Multan (Pakistan)

**RÉSUMÉ** Le tabagisme constitue une grave préoccupation de santé publique. La présente communication décrit une campagne antitabac destinée aux étudiants de la Faculté de Médecine Nishtar et de l'Université Bahauddin Zakariya de Multan. Le but était de promouvoir le sport et de décourager le tabagisme par la participation et la mobilisation de la communauté. Une stratégie mixte médiatique a été adoptée et des matériels d'information et d'éducation ont été élaborés. Un séminaire d'information sur le tabagisme, les risques qu'il comporte, les stratégies pour arrêter de fumer et les expériences de sevrage tabagique a été organisé, suivi d'un match de cricket entre étudiants à l'occasion duquel d'autres brochures ont été distribuées et des slogans arborés. Cette activité a été un franc succès et a permis de mobiliser la communauté et de faire passer le message antitabac. De telles occasions pourraient être utilisées pour promouvoir d'autres questions liées au mode de vie.

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## Introduction

Many people smoke and are therefore at risk of developing tobacco-related illness such as cancer, heart disease, emphysema and respiratory disease. Those who do not smoke may have colleagues, friends or family members who do, and they risk prematurely losing a friend or relative to a tobacco-related disease. Each year, tobacco causes some 4 million premature deaths, with 1 million of these occurring in countries that can least afford the health-care burden [1]. This epidemic is predicted to kill 250 million children and adolescents who are alive today, a third of whom live in developing countries [1]. By the year 2030, tobacco is likely to be the world's leading cause of death and disability, killing more than 10 million people annually and claiming more lives than HIV, tuberculosis, maternal mortality, motor vehicle accidents, suicide and homicide combined [2].

Tobacco is a risk factor for some 25 diseases and while its effects on health are well known, the sheer scale of its impact on the global disease burden may still not be fully appreciated. No single disease is expected to make such a huge claim on health as this 1 risk factor. Estimates indicate that tobacco is already responsible for about 2.6% of the total death and disease burden, and that this figure is projected to triple [3].

Smoking is one of the most serious public health issues in Pakistan and the increasing trend amongst youth is of grave concern. The bulk of the huge promotion budget of the tobacco companies is spent on advertising to attract youth. Cultural events and sports are also exploited for the same purpose.

It has been experimentally and epidemiologically proven that smoking is crucially injurious to sportsmen and sportswomen [4]. Young people who smoke cannot per-

form well on the playing field and are at higher risk of contracting smoking-related diseases [4]. The exploitation of sports by the tobacco companies through sponsorship and by targeting youth is immoral and should be discouraged at the national level.

Taking this into account, the Department of Community Medicine, Nishtar Medical College in Multan devised a plan to launch a target-oriented anti-smoking campaign using the slogans "Smoking is injurious to health" and "Promote sports, discourage smoking". The aims were to promote sports and discourage smoking through community participation and mobilization of resources and to combat the advertising campaigns of tobacco companies by introducing national and international celebrities campaigning against smoking.

Students at Bahauddin Zakariya University and the medical students at Nishtar Medical College, Multan were targeted. Official permission was obtained from both establishments to approach the students. The Department of Mass Communication at Bahauddin Zakariya University was contacted and invited to participate.

## Methodology

A mixed media strategy (including brochures, banners, leaflets, a seminar, radio, newspapers) was adopted to communicate the anti-smoking message. The relevant information, education and communication materials were developed through a series of brainstorming sessions with medical students and doctors. The outcome of this exercise was a number of anti-smoking slogans; a brochure detailing the important aspects of smoking; and lecture materials covering smoking as a world-wide epidemic, promotional issues, hazards of active and passive smoking, alternatives to be

adopted for quitting smoking and the need for action against this social evil. The slogans were used on cloth banners and in the brochure.

A cricket team was formed from the medical students and all the necessary equipment for the cricket match was collected. To encourage active participation, formal prizes comprising certificates of appreciation, trophies and books were obtained and labelled with the campaign slogans.

A staunch effort was made for social mobilization. Repeated visits to the university by the medical college delegation, comprising both teachers and students, motivated the target group very much. The senior staff at Bahauddin Zakariya University and the editor of the daily newspaper *Osaaf* agreed to actively participate in the campaign.

It was decided that the seminar would be held at Bahauddin Zakariya University followed by the cricket match. The university sports were also being held during that time, so the tying of the anti-smoking campaign with this health promoting exercise gave further significance to the activities.

The seminar was attended by senior staff from the university and the medical college, the editor of *Osaaf*, the chairman of Al-Shifa Medical City, lecturers from all the university departments and teachers of community medicine at Nishtar Medical College. The audience comprised a large number of students from the university and medical college.

The seminar included an address by the professor of the chest ward at Nishtar Medical College and a detailed account of smoking presented by some of the medical students. Pathogenesis, the hazards of smoking, withdrawal and epidemiological aspects were described in detail. All the speakers showed serious concern about the

increasing incidence of smoking and the availability of cigarettes.

It was emphasized that the government should take strong steps to discourage smoking. It should discount the revenue from tobacco and take bold steps to ban smoking. In the closing address, the Vice Chancellor of Bahauddin Zakariya University recounted his own experience of quitting smoking. He highlighted the findings of the medical professionals concerning the hazards of smoking, what symptoms appeared after quitting smoking and what techniques should be adopted to give up smoking. He has introduced a ban on the sale of cigarettes on university premises as a step towards encouraging students to quit smoking and to encourage others to do so.

The brochure was distributed to all who attended the seminar. The chairperson also announced a special prize for those who volunteered to quit smoking. Under this stimulus, many students announced they would give up smoking for ever. They threw away their packets of cigarette and destroyed them.

After the seminar, a friendly cricket match was played between the students of Nishtar Medical College Multan and Students of Mass Communication. The boundary of the ground was decorated with a display of "No smoking" banners. Many other cricket lovers joined the spectators and enjoyed the activity. The anti-smoking brochure was also distributed among the spectators.

## Discussion

The activity was highly successful in achieving the basic objective: communicating the no smoking message. It also succeeded in mobilizing the community, evidenced by the active participation of senior

university staff, students and the media. Most of the participants were keen to contribute in the overall organization and management of the seminar. The *Osaaf* people provided full sponsorship for the activity, including the banners and trophies.

The target group (youth) who were approached not only actively participated in the activity and showed enthusiasm to discourage smoking at every level but also enjoyed playing in the cricket match. The trophies with the no smoking slogan will remain a memory for ever and will be a reminder to continue the effort against smoking.

The quit smoking message was immediately followed by an alternative to smoking (sports), an example for youth who indulge in smoking as an exciting activity. This cricket match gave them message of real excitement and heroism. The slogan to quit smoking and adopt sports is ideal for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle: it has been rightly said, "Where you find the playing grounds in full swing, there you will find silent and functionless hospitals."

The university students and medical college students are the select youth of the nation, examples for others. In society, they are often taken as ideals for children and illiterate people. The involvement and mobilization of this group will have a significant effect in the community. In the university and medical college we find students who are representative of a wide variety of communities and areas. If these

are well mobilized against smoking, then the message can be communicated to isolated communities as well.

The cricket match developed a permanent, friendly relationship between the medical students and the mass communication students. These friendship ties will be helpful in future to maintain the impetus for organizing health education activities as many of the mass communication students will work in public media and the medical students will have comprehensive technical knowledge.

Resource constraint was the major problem faced in the campaign. Although we had sufficient human resources, managing the project required financial support, which was insufficient and caused some difficulties organizing such a high level activity. However the concentrated efforts of the students, staff members and others made it possible to conduct a successful seminar and hold a unforgettable cricket match.

## Conclusion

Promotion of healthy lifestyles amongst youth by exploiting sports and formal educational forums like colleges and universities is an efficient strategy and is strongly recommended. Agencies involved in health topics such as smoking, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection could exploit similar events to achieve their goals.

## References

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#### **World No Tobacco Day 2005**

World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) 2005 focused on the role of health professionals in tobacco control. Health professionals have a prominent role to play in tobacco control as they have the trust of the population, the media and opinion leaders, and their voices are heard across a vast range of social, economic and political arenas.

At the individual level, they can educate the population on the harms of tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke. They can also help tobacco users overcome their addiction. At the community level, health professionals can be initiators or supporters of some of the policy measures described above, by engaging, for example, in efforts to promote smoke free workplaces and extending the availability of tobacco cessation resources. At the society level, health professionals can add their voice and their weight to national and global tobacco control efforts like tax increase campaigns and become involved at the national level in promoting the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

Further information on the Tobacco Free Initiative at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean can be found at: <http://www.emro.who.int/tfi/tfi.htm>