



Consumers Helping
Others Improve
their Condition by
Ending Smoking

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Consumers Now Have CHOICES in Addressing Their Smoking

Martha Dwyer, MA, LCADC, CTTS

Most people who smoke want to quit, including those with mental illness. Frequently individuals minimize the health consequences of tobacco use and many mental health consumers believe they are not capable of quitting. Thanks to a grant from the American Legacy Foundation a tremendous opportunity is now available to NJ smokers with mental illness to receive support from peers in quitting smoking. It is a new and exciting program called CHOICES, which stands for "Consumers Helping Others Improve their Condition by Ending Smoking". The University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ), the Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ), and the State of New Jersey Mental Health Services (DMHS) have joined together in partnership to begin this program.

CHOICES is innovative because it will employ two mental health consumers, called Consumer Tobacco Advocates, to deliver the message to other consumers who smoke that it is possible for them to address their tobacco use. The Consumer Tobacco Advocates are ex-smokers themselves and appreciate the challenges that consumers face when try to quit smoking. They will serve as positive role models, demonstrating that one can be successful in quitting. The Consumer Tobacco Advocates will be given training on tobacco addiction, the links between tobacco and mental illness, as well as available

treatment options. They will visit mental health centers, self-help centers and health fairs to communicate with and educate consumers about their smoking. They will have resources about places in New Jersey where smokers with mental illness can receive tobacco dependence treatment.

Tobacco Jones

**Good-bye cigarette
Good-bye butt
Into my budget
You slice a cut
You yellow my walls
With your deadly smoke
You make me gag
You make me choke
I kind of admit
That you I will miss
But no longer will you be
On my breath or my kiss
Now I bid you
An attempted good-bye
And maybe prolong
My time to die**



*Beth M.
Highland Park, NJ*

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The Connection Between Smoking and Mental Illness

Jill Williams, MD

Research studies indicate that 50 – 90% of mental health consumers are current smokers, rates that are 2-4 times greater than the general population. This means that if you do not have a mental illness, you have a 1 in 5 chance of being a smoker. If you have suffered from a condition like depression, schizophrenia or alcoholism, you have almost a 4 in 5 chance of being a smoker. In addition, estimates are that nearly half of all the cigarettes consumed in the United States are by individuals with a current mental illness. Our research has shown that mental health consumers living in New Jersey spend about 1/3 of their monthly disability check on cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Nicotine, the component of tobacco that is addicting, has many effects on the brain and it is perhaps not so surprising that tobacco use is associated with a number of mental health problems. Smoking is linked to depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, attention deficit disorder and substance abuse as well as other mental health conditions. Studies show that people with alcoholism die more from smoking caused diseases (like heart attacks and cancer) than even die from alcohol itself. People who get depressed when they try to quit smoking are more likely to go back to smoking. In addition to the biological connections, some people believe that the tolerance for smoking in mental health treatment settings, and the lack of access to stop smoking treatments has also contributed to the high rates of smoking among the mentally ill.

Understand the risks in continuing to smoke. Tobacco is addictive and kills more Americans than suicide, homicide, AIDS, and most other known illnesses. Mental health consumers die more frequently from heart attacks, cancer and emphysema, which are all caused by smoking. Medications are available to help people quit smoking and are much safer than continuing to smoke. More research is needed to better understand the connections between smoking and mental illness and to develop better treatments. All mental health consumers deserve access to effective smoking treatments.

Dr. Williams is an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the UMDNJ- Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in Piscataway. Dr. Williams has received a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to develop more effective treatments for consumers with mental illness. Currently, Dr. Williams has studies underway to examine the use of nicotine nasal spray as an aid to help people with schizophrenia stop smoking. Anyone interested in talking to us about participating in a UMDNJ research study should contact us at 732-235-9711.

“Smoking is linked to depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, attention deficit disorder and substance abuse as well as other mental health conditions.”

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?
The mental health system needs to do more to help mental health consumers quit smoking. Tobacco addiction is an important problem that should be part of every consumer’s treatment plan. Even consumers who do not want to quit smoking should be given information so they un-

Do Mental Health Consumers Want to Quit Smoking? Can They?

Marie D. Verna

Despite the startling statistics you read about in this newsletter, New Jersey's public health system pays very little attention to the critical issues related to the long-term recovery of and quality of life for people with mental illnesses who are addicted to tobacco.

Many professionals and family members believe that mental health consumers are unable or unwilling to quit. Some believe that nicotine serves as a form of tranquilizer for people with mental illness. And in some treatment settings, cigarettes are used as a form of reward or punishment. In fact, research has shown that nicotine actually interferes with the pharmaceutical benefits of some mental health drugs. And many consumers, when asked, say that they smoke to break up the monotony of treatment settings where very little therapeutic activity takes place. But once consumers learn about the health risks of tobacco and the mortality and morbidity rates of individuals with mental illness, many of them make decisions to quit and succeed.

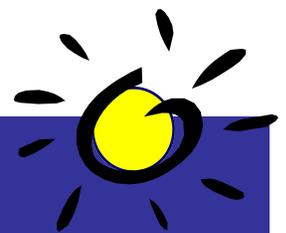
For mental health consumers who smoke and who are on public assistance, the problem goes beyond neglect of these serious health issues. These people spend an inor-

dinate percentage of their money on cigarettes, yet are virtually ignored in public health policy regarding tobacco and nicotine cessation. Despite the volume of cigarettes smoked by people with mental illnesses, this population received virtually no dedicated monies when New Jersey received its share of the Master Settlement Agreement and the Department of Health and Senior Services established the state's Comprehensive Tobacco Control Program (CTTP).

The Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ) believes that treatment for mental illness must include a holistic, wellness-centered approach to all health—mental and otherwise—that leads consumers back to full and productive lives of the longest duration possible. While it's true that nicotine addictions are deep-seated in many of the people we advocate for, and some would suspect that consumers **couldn't quit**, we believe that consumers deserve the full choice to attempt such wellness-oriented treatments and the necessary supports to succeed. Our education and advocacy programs have shown consistently that, when presented with accurate, clear information, consumers often are capable of far more

than others have thought possible.

Marie Verna is the Director of Consumer Advocacy for the Mental Health Association in New Jersey and works to involve consumers in the development of all public policy concerning them. Marie works as staff to the Consumer Advocacy Partnership, whose policy on wellness and recovery was developed by and for New Jersey's mental health consumers. Prior to MHANJ, Marie worked as the program director of the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse and as a writer for various corporations in the profit sector.



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www.mhanj.org

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Consumers Now Have CHOICES in Addressing Their Smoking (continued)

The Consumer Tobacco Advocates will offer interested consumers feedback about their own smoking and its impact on their health and finances. CHOICES is based on the belief that all mental health consumers should be given the information that can help them to think about their own smoking and consider quitting. Talking to a peer about smoking may be easier for some people than talking with their doctor.

This CHOICES newsletter will be published four times a year and sent out to mental health consumers throughout New Jersey. We hope that you will share it with your friends and family and encourage them to join our mailing list. There is no charge to receive CHOICES newsletter. We also want to hear from **you** about your experiences as a smoker (or former smoker) so please write to us.



FREE MAILING LIST PLEASE PRINT

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Address _____

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Telephone (_____) _____ - _____

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