



Consumers Helping
Others Improve
their Condition by
Ending Smoking

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CHOICES Greeted with Enthusiasm

Martha Dwyer, MA, LCADC, CTTS

On June 15th the official kick-off for CHOICES was celebrated in Trenton. The event was sponsored by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, the Mental Health Association in New Jersey and the State of NJ, Division of Mental Health Services.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Jill Williams, the Medical Director of CHOICES, explained that CHOICES is a peer-to-peer support network of Consumer Tobacco Advocates. These mental health consumers try to reach out to other consumers who smoke. The audience heard from representatives of the three partnering organizations and from mental health consumers who themselves are trying to quit smoking.

Department of Human Services Commissioner James Davy said, "Excessive smoking can be a major problem among people with mental illness. This [CHOICES] is an innovative way to address this and have a positive impact on the lives of people with mental illness." He also expressed special appreciation for the vision and work of Dr. Williams.



Carolyn Beauchamp, President and CEO of the Mental Health Association in NJ, noted "smokers with psychiatric disorders consume nearly half of all cigarettes in the United States. Only recently have public health specialists and clinical researchers begun to better understand and treat this major problem."

The audience enthusiastically applauded when three mental health consumers shared

their own experiences with quitting. A UMDNJ-UBHC mental health counselor talked about the positive response he has received from consumers when he helps them address smoking as part of their recovery. CHOICES has met with similar enthusiasm and support as word of the program spreads throughout the mental health community.

In July, our two new Consumer Tobacco Advocates, Yasmin Halim and Wayne Holland, received training to prepare them with the skills and knowledge to reach out to peers who smoke. They want to carry the message that smoking is harmful and that treatment works. They are now visiting self-help centers, mental health programs, and health fairs throughout New Jersey. You can contact them via e-mail at yhalim@mhanj.org or wholland@mhanj.org.

We are encouraging people who are interested to sign up for this free newsletter. Please contact us for more information about how to bring CHOICES to you.

Consumer Perspective:

Bill N.

Sometimes I just don't get it and I go back to smoking. But I keep trying to quit and the most important thing about quitting is not giving into the cigarette. Just last week I ended up smoking when things did not go my way (after 41 days quit). I could not get the nasal spray renewed early and have that extra boost of spray I think I needed. I smoked the whole weekend and did not want to see anyone about my smoking problem anymore.

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An Interview with Margaret Molnar

How did you become interested in addressing smoking and tobacco with mental health consumers?

As a mental health consumer, I began my own recovery journey recognizing the importance of self-care and taking responsibility in the healing process several years ago following the publication of some research studies. These studies found that mental health consumers are at much greater risk of chronic and debilitating physical illnesses and are more likely to die prematurely than the population as a whole from preventable diseases associated with unhealthy lifestyle behaviors such as smoking and obesity. These study findings prompted me to take a close look at my own decisions and behaviors.

I was also challenged on a professional level, since at that time I was working as the Program Coordinator at the New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse. I was well aware of the powerful impact of peer-based services so I knew that there would be an opportunity for a self-help organization like CHOICES to address smoking which one of the most serious threats to our health and life.

What did you decide to do?

I spoke with a colleague who is also a mental health consumer. We organized the first statewide conference to address physical and mental health care issues for mental health consumers in New Jersey.

We invited Dr. David Weed, a renowned author and trainer from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, to speak at the conference. Dr. Weed provided facts about preventable chronic diseases and the behaviors that lead to these diseases such as smoking. He

spoke about why we continue to engage in these behaviors and how understanding motivates change. He also provided us with some tools to make a positive change.

It was very exciting for me to discover how much my fellow consumers shared my interest in learning about physical health and making a positive life change--whether it be smoking cessation, weight reduction, or staying sober. People felt safe to be honest and share their concerns with one another. And at the same time this was helping us to address healthy lifestyle decisions and to enforce positive feelings of self-worth. That was something that I myself had struggled with for a long time, and found the camaraderie of that group to be amazingly supportive in making a positive, but gradual change in my own life.

I think that we all left the conference with a heightened sense of hopefulness that we could make changes.

How does this relate to the CHOICES program?

CHOICES is a powerful peer support network that encourages mental health consumers to make a positive healthy lifestyle change by addressing smoking and tobacco use.

The CHOICES Consumer Advocates are trained to provide their peers with education about the consequences of smoking and about treatment resources available to make quitting easier.

CHOICES instills the hope that quitting smoking is possible, provides the information needed to make an informed decision but mostly provides that sense of hopefulness that we need in order to make changes, and that we don't have to hold on to old ideas and behaviors.

Margaret Molnar is the Specialist Assistant to the Director for Community Affairs at the State of NJ, Division of Mental Health Services



Dr. Jill's Quit Tips

By Jill Williams, M.D.

- ◆ Most experts recommend that EVERYONE trying to quit smoking should use medications to help them.
- ◆ There are 5 types of nicotine medications and one non-nicotine medication called bupropion.
- ◆ Nicotine patch, nicotine gum and nicotine lozenge are available in stores without a doctor's prescription.
- ◆ Nicotine inhaler, nicotine nasal spray and bupropion are available with a doctor's prescription and are covered by Medicaid in New Jersey.

People who use medications to quit smoking

- ◆ Are twice as likely to be successful in quitting smoking than people who do not use medication.
- ◆ Gain less weight when they quit smoking than people who do not use medication.
- ◆ Have less unpleasant nicotine withdrawal symptoms and less craving for nicotine.

Find out more about Dr. Williams' work at <http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/addiction/fauculty/williams.htm>

Consumer Perspective Continued

The thing is I built up a network of friends that love me enough to know I need to quit smoking. They almost forced me to seek help again.

My network is wonderful and as I quit smoking it grows. I have friends on the computer also that help me quit and say I should never give up. I just was not going to go to NJQuitNet.com and end my connection to the CHOICES program and newsletter. Then they said I can do it again and it will be easier. My network help get all the ashtrays and cigarettes out of my apartment. Today I have 3-1/2 days off cigarettes but at 3 packs/day three days ago I know I am doing well now.

Well the NRT (nicotine replacement therapy) might be able to take most of the credit for the times when I see a person light up or when I just feel like smoking. NRT and

deep breaths yes I can smoke but I make a CHOICE not to. This can happen. Or else I will clench my fists and doing anything but smoking. Sometimes I would get angry that I cannot smoke and I think tightly for five or ten seconds and then relax them. Shaking the anger out with a deep breath and sigh. I have a final cigarette that I burnt to the end and placed it next to the candle that is shaped like a castle that is burnt down. This is because I have to remember I could burn the house down (my castle) if I continue to smoke. It sits on top of a dragon that seems to have burnt that castle down. And I will never sing "Puff the Magic Dragon" again without thinking about this image of my castle burnt down.

You can visit Bill N's blog at:
<http://www.xoet.blogspot.com>





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