



In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

Message from

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to the

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2005

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On the occasion of World No Tobacco Day 2005, the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is celebrating the theme “Health Professionals against Tobacco”. Health professionals include: doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists, psychologists, psychiatrists, pharmacists and other members of the health-related professions.

Between 2002 and 2004, WHO in collaboration with its partners developed the Health Professionals Survey which was administered in Egypt, Jordan, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The survey revealed that over 23% of health professionals smoke, with an average consumption of 16 cigarettes a day.

And although 97.9% of survey participants agreed that smoking is harmful to health, only 10% had successfully quit smoking, and 70% of those who smoke regularly believed that a physician who smokes is less likely to advise his/her patients to stop smoking.

Nonetheless, more than 75% of health professionals in the countries surveyed consistently agreed with the need to implement the elements of comprehensive tobacco control. For all but price increases, support was virtually unanimous.

Moreover, in another survey of third year medical students which was conducted in 14 universities across Egypt in 2004, it was found that 17% of the students currently smoke cigarettes; over the past year, 41% smoked on school premises while 30.9% smoked inside school buildings.

78% of the medical students surveyed believed that health professionals serve as role models for their patients, and 91.1% believed that health professionals do have a role in giving smoking cessation advice to their patients.

In January 2004, WHO organized a meeting for health professional organizations from all around the globe. The purpose of this meeting was to explore with various international health professional organizations (medical doctors as well as nurses, pharmacists, dentists, etc.) potential ways in which they could contribute to tobacco control and other public health goals. Their potential role in the signature, ratification and implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) was also addressed.

In order to contribute actively to the reduction of tobacco consumption and include tobacco control in the public health agenda at national, regional and global levels a "code of practice" for health professional organizations was developed as a result of the meeting. This outlines the potential role of health professional organizations in treatment of tobacco dependence and smoking cessation.

The code of practice for health professionals indicated that health professionals' organizations should:

- encourage and support their members to be role models by not using tobacco and by promoting a tobacco-free culture;
- assess and address the tobacco consumption patterns and tobacco control attitudes of their members through surveys and the introduction of appropriate policies;
- make their own organizations' premises and events tobacco free and encourage their members to do the same;
- include tobacco control in the agenda of all relevant health related congresses and conferences;
- advise their members to routinely ask patients and clients about tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke—using evidence-based approaches and best practices—give advice on how to quit smoking and ensure appropriate follow-up of their cessation goals to influence health institutions and educational centres to include tobacco control in their health professionals' curricula, through continued education and other training programmes;
- actively participate in World No Tobacco Day every 31 May;
- refrain from accepting any kind of tobacco industry support—financial or otherwise—and from investing in the tobacco industry, and encourage their members to do the same;
- to ensure that their organization has a stated policy on any commercial or other kind of relationship with partners who interact with or have interests in the tobacco industry through a declaration of interest;
- prohibit the sale or promotion of tobacco products on their premises, and encourage their members to do the same;
- actively support governments in the process leading to signature, ratification and implementation of the WHO FCTC;
- dedicate financial and/or other resources to tobacco control—including dedicating resources to the implementation of this code of practice;
- participate in the tobacco control activities of health professional networks; and
- support campaigns for tobacco free public places.

Alone, no one can succeed but together we surely will. On this World No Tobacco Day, I call upon you all as health professionals to work hand in hand in support of tobacco control.