

Knowledge Practice and Attitude Regarding Tobacco use Among Interns of A Private Medical College: A Cross Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Tobacco surveillance among medical students offers an opportunity to assess the preparedness for tobacco control among future health care professionals in India. Objective of the study was to study the awareness and pattern of tobacco use among the Undergraduate Medical Students of a private medical college in Mangalore, Dakshina Kannada.

Material and Methods: A Cross-sectional study was conducted among 102 medical students using a predesigned and pretested, semi-structured self-administered anonymous questionnaire. Data was analyzed by using SPSS v 16.

Results: Among 102 participants, 19(18.6%) were smokers. Majority of them were aged between 19-21 years with age of initiation being less than 18 years. Cigarette smoking was most common form of abuse among these students.

Conclusion: In the study smoking was found to be more prevalent in males as compared to females. Smoking also showed a consistent rise with the increasing age group and was found to maximum in the older age group. Awareness about harmful effects of tobacco abuse was good and they feel that tobacco cessation modules should be incorporated in the medical curriculum.

Keywords: Tobacco, Medical Students, Cessation, Undergraduates

INTRODUCTION

Tobacco use has been stated as the single largest preventable cause of mortality and premature death worldwide according to a report published by World Health Organization in 2011.¹ In developing countries like India, mortality attributed to tobacco use is on an increase and has been estimated to reach around 13% by the year 2020.² This grave scenario clearly emphasizes the need to implement tobacco cessation program in the society with full vigour. It is here that health care professionals need to step in and join the battle against tobacco. The WHO framework convention on tobacco control, further emphasize the role of primary healthcare physicians in tobacco cessation campaigns in the community.³⁻⁵ Patients often seek advice, guidance on most health related issues from a primary healthcare physician, it becomes clear that the doctors are in a position to impart knowledge and help patients to quit tobacco. Medical students who are the future doctors of the society become a very relevant activists against tobacco. The medical interns are in a unique positions in a healthcare hierarchy wherein they get to see patients from all speciality and are exposed to all patients in general and therefore are in a better position to impart knowledge against tobacco. Hence this study was conducted with the objective to assess the knowledge, practice and

attitude towards tobacco use among graduates of a private medical college in Mangalore, Karnataka.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study population comprised of medical graduates who were doing internship training program in a private medical college in Mangalore, Karnataka. This was a cross sectional study done using a predesigned, semi structured, self-reported, anonymous questionnaire. After obtaining approval of the Institutional Ethics Committee, our participants were briefed about the study and those willing were asked to give a written informed consent. The study questionnaire was distributed among 130 interns, but only 108 completed questionnaire could be subjected to analysis. The questionnaire comprised of questions pertaining to the use of tobacco, pattern of tobacco use and cessation practice.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Data was analysed using SPSS software version 16. Descriptive statistics were used to infer results.

RESULTS

Demographic data and smoking rates

The response rate in the present study was 83.07%. Out of 130 questionnaires distributed, 22 were discarded due to incompleteness. A total of 108 were collected out of which 41.6% were males and 58.3% were females. The overall prevalence rate of smoking was 9.25% (n=10). The smoking rates were higher among male (17.7%), n=8. Compared to the female counterparts, where it was recorded as 3.17%, n=2. (Table 1)

Knowledge regarding tobacco use

Majority of the interns were well aware of tobacco use and their ill effects. 88% of them gave correct responses to the queries asked (mean n = 95.1). Most of them agreed to the fact that tobacco is hazardous to the general health (100%, n=108). Very few people were aware of the harmful effects

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How to cite this article: Aruna Yadiyal, Supriya Hegde. Knowledge practice and attitude regarding tobacco use among interns of a private medical college: a cross sectional study. International Journal of Contemporary Medical Research 2016;3(2):607-609.

of passive smoking among non-smokers (94.4%, n=102). People were aware about the maternal smoking hazards and paternal smoking effects (85.18%, n=92) and 79.6%, n=86 respectively. 76.8%, n=83 had knowledge about the third hand smoking and could comprehend the association of passive smoking with neonatal deaths (Table 2)

Patterns of Tobacco use

Among our subjects with tobacco habits, 100% were smokers. The consecutive questionnaire thus assessed only about the pattern of smoking rather than the overall use of tobacco. A total of 16 interns (14.8%) admitted to smoking cigarettes some time in their life and this percentage was slightly higher than the current cross sectional prevalence rate (9.25%). Further questions No. 3-10 were designed to assess smoking patterns, out of 10 smokers, around 70% had early onset of smoking prior to their admission into the medical college. With 40% of them reporting to have increased smoking, 20% of them have decreased use of cigarettes, with the further 40% maintaining the same level of smoking.

When asked to quantify, 10% of them admitted to use more than 20 cigarettes per day whereas 30% smoked 5-20 cigarettes per day with majority (60%) reporting to have smoked less than 5 cigarettes per day. Only 40% of them tried to quit smoking some time in their life with half of them experiencing craving while trying to do so. In spite of this, 50% of smokers did not feel they were dependent or addicted to nicotine while a mere 20% were unsure about it. About 60% responded positively when asked if they have plans to quit in the future.

Attitude towards smoking cessation practices:

As much as 67.5% of interns (n=23) opined that doctors should positively speak about tobacco use to their patients but only 56.48% (n=61) reported of asking history themselves. Around 64.8% (n=70) thought that it is doctor's duty to advise against tobacco use, only 41.6% (n=45) could actually do so with their patients. 62.9% (n=68) agreed that interventions by health professionals helped people quit smoking, majority did not convince their patients (93.5%). 88.8% (n=96) were not confident enough to counsel their patients enough on this topic. Majority of them showed positive responses towards corrective measures, only 85.18% (n=92) were supportive towards a tobacco free campus. 73.1% (n=79) felt the need for ban on advertising tobacco products. 62.9% (n=68) advocated for a sharp increase in the prices of tobacco to stop its usage. When asked to opine about doctors who smoked, 84.23% (n=91) reported of having a negative opinion about them. 13.82% (n=15) preferred to stay neutral. 78.7% (n=85) of interns agreed that the health professionals should set a good examples by not smoking and 87.9% (n=95) also opined that the doctors who smoke are less likely to advise about it.

DISCUSSION

The overall prevalence of smoking among interns was 9.25% in our study with a significant male preponderance of M:F =

6:1. This rate was much low in comparison with the general population^{6,7} and also in comparison with similar studies conducted on medicos.^{5,8-11}

Our study findings showed interns in a positive light when it came to assessment of their knowledge regarding harmful effects of tobacco, where majority of them were well aware of common hazards of tobacco use and also had knowledge about second and third hand smoke. These findings were consistent with few studies are also found to be contradictory to findings of some other similarly conducted research.¹²⁻¹⁴ In this study assessment of pattern of tobacco use in interns shed light on the early onset of smoking in many with admission into medical school having no much influence on their smoking patterns. Though not many were heavy smokers, many still did not feel the need to quit nor could they perceive their habit as addiction and these sounds disturbing at many levels. Other studies done elsewhere across the globe have shown both similar and varying results on several parameters assessed.¹⁵⁻²³

The present study while assessing attitudes and opinions of interns showed that though majority of students felt strongly doctors should routinely ask about tobacco use and advice against it, only half of them were actually practicing it on their patients. Though a significant percentage of them agreed to have received enough education in their curriculum, they have inhibitions to practice it due to lack of formal training in counselling against its usage. Our subjects however felt strongly about corrective measures and were in favour of tobacco sales ban near school, college campuses, enclosed public places. They also felt that tobacco sales should be restricted to children and young adolescents, similar studies done in this field reflect a similar picture with minimal variations¹⁶⁻²⁵

The results of the present study clearly points towards lacunae in the current medical curriculum and our training programs. Since this study focussed on interns, who happen to be the first nodal point of therapeutic contact for patients in various specialties; they can be mentored for such preventive programs in the future. It is imperative that the current internship training programs must compulsorily include special training programs and workshops specific to tobacco cessation. Such innovative addition into the medical curriculum will definitely empower the intern community to deliver tobacco cessation services to all patients confidently and efficiently.

CONCLUSION

	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Total no of questionnaires collected	108 out of 130	83.07%
Male interns	45	41.6%
Females	63	58.3%
People who smoked	10	9.25%
Male	8	17.7%
Female	2	3.17%

Table-1: Demographic data and prevalence of smoking

Our study has rightly focussed on the health of the health giver where though the prevalence rates of tobacco use was lower, in spite of adequate knowledge it did not translate into positive practices towards tobacco cessation. This can be mainly attributed to the lack of training during their under graduation, hence the onus is on the policy makers to revise the curriculum to fit in tobacco cessation training. This may help them deliver services adequately and efficiently to patients and also we can aim at tobacco free society.

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Source of Support: Nil; **Conflict of Interest:** None

Submitted: 09-01-2016; **Published online:** 30-01-2016