



Choice is a Key Element in Success for Smokers Who Want to Quit

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May 22, 2007, Smokers who have a say in how they quit are more likely to try kicking the habit and are more successful, according to new research at the University of Rochester.

Rochester researcher Dr. Geoffrey Williams associate professor of medicine at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, will unveil new findings at a Toronto conference this month that demonstrate patient involvement in a quit plan leads to smokers who are more motivated to quit because they genuinely want to, not because they are being nagged or bullied.

Williams will be one of more than 300 researchers from 25 countries to gather at the University of Toronto this weekend to discuss their work within Self-Determination Theory. This groundbreaking psychological theory of human motivation was developed by University of Rochester psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan.

Williams' team of researchers found that smokers who were counseled in a manner that encouraged them to reflect on whether they wanted to smoke or not, and if not why they were trying to quit, were more likely to maintain their abstinence for two years than those who received usual care.

Participants in the control group were simply given a list of quit resources in the community and were encouraged to visit their doctor for help, while participants in the special program received one-on-one counseling and more.

Williams said patients in the cessation program were asked about their willingness to and confidence in quitting, their history with tobacco, general medical history, and even their life aspirations. Smokers in the program were also encouraged to take part in developing a personalized quit plan by providing input and perspective on how smoking fit into their lives and which aspects of quitting were most daunting.

The support and choice patients received in the program resulted in a greater motivation to quit, willingness to try medications, higher levels of commitment to quit plans, and ultimately, more successes. Williams said the cessation plan offered additional support to smokers that a typical doctor's office doesn't.

"I don't think they get enough time and I don't think they get enough input and choice into the quit plan," Williams said. "Our findings showed it was particularly important to promote patient choice and active participation in the plan."

Williams said the method has also proved successful for patients managing diabetes, weight loss, and dental care.

Along with Ryan, who is a professor of psychology, psychiatry, and education, Deci, the Gowen Professor in the Social Sciences, and Williams, Rochester research assistant professor Heather Patrick will also present at the conference. She has applied Self-Determination Theory to a common conundrum of romantic relationships: If you do something positive for your mate, does it matter why? The answer is yes according to Patrick's research. She found that both small sacrifices, like doing the dishes for your partner, and big ones, like moving across the country for a new job he or she really wants, mean more if you do them because you genuinely want to.

Both Patrick's and Williams' research illustrates the crux of Self-Determination Theory: A self-motivated person derives more satisfaction in completing a given task, and is more likely to do it well. The research presented at the conference will explore motivation in human development, education, work, relationships, sports, health, medicine, virtual environments, psychotherapy, and cross-cultural applications.

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