

Tuesday 15 September 2009

Cold turkey – cold comfort for some?

As pressure mounts on the government to toughen up against tobacco, cessation experts are urging ministers to ensure the public understands the nature of nicotine addiction – and how to quit.

Paula Snowden, Chief Executive of The Quit Group, which runs the successful Quitline, said that political measures against tobacco were vital, but equally important was helping people to give up.

“Listening to the current debate, you’d think there were two choices – smoke, or quit cold turkey. But recent statistics show that if you quit using support, you’re five times as likely to succeed – that includes Māori and Pacific smokers.

“We salute those who quit the hard way, but there are other choices and the research is clear – cold turkey doesn’t work for most people – that’s why it’s called ‘the hard way’,” she added.

Approximately 20% of New Zealanders smoke, though the figure is around double that for Māori. Around 5000 Kiwis are killed by smoking each year – around a fifth of those Māori.

Paula, whose tribal affiliations are Ngapuhi, says it is absolutely vital that smokers are given the information and support to ensure they have the best chance of staying quit.

“Wanting to quit is one thing, staying quit is a whole different ballgame. And that’s where we come in – with a game plan, tailored advice and a range of nicotine therapies. And we’ll even help you through the slip-ups!”

The Quitline also offers subsidised nicotine replacement products (NRT) such as patches and lozenges, which by themselves are shown to double a smoker’s chance of quitting.

“We understand that a lot of people, particularly Māori and Pacific, are wary of using nicotine products. But they are proven to be safe, and they work. They have just enough nicotine in them to get you off the smokes, and don’t come packaged with the 5,000 other chemicals that harm you.”

NRT is now also available on prescription, so a four-week course costs only \$3.

“Smoking is not a choice, it’s an addiction and it’s killing us. We’re heartened by the fact that the quit rate for Māori smokers is now on par with the rest of the population. But we need to do whatever we can to prevent further unnecessary death and sickness, and we need to support current smokers to quit – and to help them stay quit.”

The Quitline can be reached on 0800 778 778.

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Notes to journalists

1. Paula Snowden took over as Chief Executive of The Quit Group in August 2009. She is available for interviews and comments on smoking-related issues, particularly around cessation, nicotine replacement therapy and Maori/Pacific issues.
2. For further information please contact: Carl Billington on 04 460 9877; Mob 021 263 5508; email carl.billington@quit.org.nz