



# Focus on...

## CESSATION SERVICES

### Provider outreach helps increase calls to Quitline Iowa

**QUITLINE IOWA**  
1-800-QUIT-NOW

**83%** of Iowa smokers want to quit.

They just need a prescription for success.



Remember your last check up? Your doctor probably asked about your family history, discussed the results of your blood tests, and covered any regular aches and pains you had been experiencing. And if you are like many Iowans, she may have talked to you about the importance of managing your weight by eating right and getting adequate physical activity.

But what about addiction?

If there's never been any reason to address this topic with your provider, consider yourself lucky. But what if you're one of the 19 percent of Iowans who uses tobacco? Has your doctor given this the attention it deserves?

"We realize it's a sensitive subject, especially in rural areas," says Jennifer Hawbaker, tobacco prevention coordinator at the Ringgold County Public Health Department. "As tobacco rates continue to decrease, current smokers already feel somewhat ostracized in our communities. With fewer than 1,700 residents in our county seat of Mt. Ayr, for example, we estimate that fewer than 185 smoke. And fewer than 70 use another form of tobacco. So in that sense, the level of sensitivity is higher. That said, the close-knit nature of small communities also makes it more likely that residents will embrace health improvement initiatives."

Enter Operation 83—a campaign from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) that educates health care providers and encourages them to promote Quitline Iowa (1-800-QUIT-NOW), the state's free telephone helpline to help Iowans break their addiction to nicotine through personalized quit plans. The campaign takes its name from some

### Quitline Facts

Research has shown that people who use Quitline Iowa are 4 to 8 times more likely to quit than people who try to quit without assistance.

In the last 10 years, more than 83,000 Iowans have received help from Quitline Iowa to overcome their addiction to nicotine.

Since January 2008, health care providers in Iowa have referred more than 22,000 patients to Quitline Iowa through the fax referral service.

Even those Iowans who continue to smoke after calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW tend to reduce the number of cigarettes they smoke by approximately 25 percent.

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quitting smoking. After learning that 83 percent of Iowa smokers want to quit and discussing the benefits of Quitline Iowa, she says the nurses felt more confident bringing up the conversation during patient consultations.

“It’s not just another question we ask our patients who use tobacco,” said Karie Wasteny, a medical clinic nurse who often works through the intake process with patients. “We’re offering concrete advice and providing Quitline Iowa resources to help them overcome nicotine addiction. In particular, I find myself talking with patients about what worked during previous quit attempts, and focusing on how to build on their successes.”

These are some of the strategies Wasteny and other staff at the clinic learned about recently during a special training funded by IDPH and presented by the Mayo Clinic on how motivational interviewing can aid tobacco cessation. Each year, IDPH sponsors three to four such trainings across the state to help local public health partners speak more confidently about cessation with their clients.

“Coupled with the Operation 83 campaign, these efforts have really helped drive provider-initiated referrals to the Quitline,” Swanson says. “In fact, during the first six months of the campaign, the percent of all 1-800-QUIT-NOW callers who said they learned about Quitline from a health care provider increased to 52 percent, compared to just 28 percent during the same period the previous year. In other words, the proportion of all Quitline calls that were the result of health care provider counseling and referral nearly doubled following the initiation of Operation 83.”

One such provider helping spread the word about 1-800-QUIT-NOW is Dr. Praveen Gundelly at the Mt. Ayr Medical Clinic. “When I found out that 83 percent of Iowans want to quit smok-

*Dr. Praveen Gundelly says that during his residency in Youngstown, Ohio, he was able to refer tobacco users to a special information center within the hospital to get help quitting. “In a rural area like Ringgold County,” he points out, “we ARE the information center.”*

intriguing data uncovered in the 2008 Iowa Adult Tobacco Survey. According to the study, 83 percent of Iowans who smoke wish to quit.

“Those of us working in public health weren’t surprised to learn that 83 percent of Iowa smokers want to find a way to give up smoking,” says Aaron Swanson, coordinator of Quitline Iowa at IDPH. “Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances we know of, but there seems to be a misconception—especially among the non-smoking general public—that tobacco use is nothing more than a bad habit or an unhealthy lifestyle choice. When we launched the Operation 83 campaign, the response was tremendous. It reminded health care providers about the power of nicotine addiction and encouraged them to use their unique position to help their patients quit tobacco once and for all.”

Hawbaker agrees. Prior to the campaign, she says that many nurses at the Ringgold County Hospital and Medical Clinic expressed hesitation in referring patients to 1-800-QUIT-NOW and felt it upset people to discuss

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- Dr. Praveen Gundelly

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In addition to encouraging their patients to take advantage of the free services available through 1-800-QUIT-NOW, Dr. Gundedly and providers like him are going the extra mile by utilizing Quitline Iowa's fax referral system—a service through which doctor and patient authorize Quitline Iowa staff to make the first call to initiate counseling services.

Hawbaker says the public health department's recent outreach to physicians has helped promote this valuable and effective service. "Prior to the Operation 83 campaign and

Mayo Clinic trainings, Quitline Iowa had not received a single fax referral from Ringgold County in the past year," she recalls. "But during the first three months of 2011, Quitline Iowa received 12 fax referrals from the Ringgold County Medical Clinic alone."

While 12 fax referrals may not seem like a lot to the rest of the state, Hawbaker calls successes like this a major achievement for her public health department. "In a county of fewer than 5,000 residents, 12 referrals represent 1.6 percent of all tobacco users in the county, and that's just in the first three months of the campaign!"

In addition, Hawbaker recalls that from January to March of last year, only two Quitline Iowa callers from Ringgold County reported calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW themselves after hearing about it from their doctor. "During the same time period this year—shortly after the Operation 83 campaign kicked off—that number quadrupled. We still have much to do, but it's a great start!"



*In November 2010, the Operation 83 campaign was introduced to all 91 counties served by IDPH community partnerships. Here, local tobacco cessation and prevention partner Tami Glienke (left) appears with one of the first providers she spoke to, Cherokee Regional Clinics Manager Lexi Henson.*