

# WHERE THERE'S A WILL...

**T**hree out of five young people who experiment with tobacco develop an addiction to nicotine, and become daily smokers in their adulthood.

It is important to understand that quitting smoking not a once-off event, but a long-term process. Smoking is a complex behaviour, involving not only the physical addiction of nicotine, but also the psychological reliance on the habit to deal with daily stresses and problems. For this reason, smokers often need help in kicking the habit. Studies have shown that only 3-5 % of smokers who attempt to quit on their own manage to quit successfully. With the help of professional quit smoking programs, their chances of success increase by four times! While it is important to continually motivate smokers to stop smoking, it is just as important to encourage them to join quit smoking programs.

The benefits of a smoke-free workplace and workforce are far reaching. Beyond the immediate reduction in sick days and medical cost, smoke-free employees enjoy better health and well-being, and are more productive workers. Many companies are already taking advantage of the health promotion services offered by the many preventive health companies to help their employees quit smoking. Schering Plough Ltd, Singapore branch, is one such example. The company organises a quit smoking program for all its smoker-employees who want to quit smoking.

Schering Plough has been very successful in their effort to stem smoking at their workplace. In 2004, 75% of its smoker-employees quit smoking after attending

the Schering Plough "Quit Smoking Program". In fact, of the 43 employees who attended the Smoking Cessation Motivation Talk, 14% gave up smoking immediately, inspired by the talk.

"The purpose is to create awareness and emphasise the adverse health effects of smoking and encourage them to change their lifestyles, to pluck up the courage and the determination to quit smoking," said Jim, an industrial nurse responsible for implementing this program. She added that for those who have difficulties in quitting immediately, the programme helps them go smoke-free gradually. The numbers of sticks of cigarettes are reduced over an agreed period of time until they are smoke-free. "The goal is to do it slowly, customised according to each smoker's ability to cope, and eventually leading them to quit," said Jim.

For smoker-employees with regular office-hour jobs, the program offers three in-house group therapy sessions. The program also offers customised sessions for shift workers, who may find it difficult to attend the program during normal office hours. These customised sessions involve two personal consultations with the quit smoking consultant.

To further encourage smokers to quit, the company reimburses half of the programme fees to those who complete the entire program. In recognition of their efforts, employees who have quit smoking for six months from the date of commencement of the program will receive another \$20 and NTUC gift vouchers as added incentives to stay smoke-free. Schering Plough's management including the managing director, Mr Mark Bridge, has been very supportive of the programme. According to Jim, this support is the key to its success.

Doesn't anyone ever return to smoking after they quit for a while? "Temptations are always there," says Jim reflectively. "Our plan is for these ex-smokers to form a support group so that they can continue to encourage one another. This also helps to build camaraderie among the employees too", she added.

Dr Tan Pik Yee from Youngberg Wellness Centre Pte Ltd, who is the key motivator in this initiative, gave all the credit to the participants. She said: "In my opinion, every participant of the Quit Now! Program is a winner in his own way. They are willing to confront their smoking addiction head-on and learn techniques on how to deal with it. Even if they did not quit in their first attempt, they have not failed. Some smokers need several failed attempts before they can quit smoking completely. Companies should continue their good efforts in providing on-going in-house quit smoking programs to assist smokers in their journey to a smoke free life." On a concluding note, she says, "It is really laudable when companies invest in quit smoking programs to assist their employees in their attempt to quit smoking. It has been such a joy working with them." **HRM**

## HEALTH PROMOTION BOARD

**H**ealth Promotion Board (HPB) can assist your organisation in the implementation of an effective 'Corporate Quit Smoking Programme'. HPB will host a half-day seminar entitled '**Partnerships in Smoking Control at Workplaces**' on 13 May 2005. This seminar will offer practical tools for the successful implementation of smoking control programmes at the workplace and will share real-life case studies.

**To register or find out more, please contact Ms Hoong Sook Wah at 6435 3010 or email at [hoong\\_sook\\_wah@hpb.gov.sg](mailto:hoong_sook_wah@hpb.gov.sg)**



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