

Tobacco ... The Good, Bad and The Ugly

By Wendy Hladick, PA-C

I recently heard some good news about Tobacco. "Youth Tobacco Use Falls" according to a recent report put out by the State of Alaska, Division of Public Health.

The results came from a 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The survey was administered to 1,500 Alaskan high school students who were randomly chosen from nearly every school district in the state. This is the first survey of its kind since 1995.

The steep drop in youth smoking was achieved after Alaska invested heavily in comprehensive tobacco prevention and control program. It showed that a strong partnership between members such as the American Heart and Lung Associations and Community-based advocacy programs made a difference. Clean indoor air ordinances, such as the ones in force in Anchorage, Juneau, Bethel Barrow, Dillingham, Kenai and Soldotna and all the many other smaller communities that have adopted informal nonsmoking policies help reduce environmental youth exposure to tobacco. Hmm, it makes me wonder if we are doing all that we can be doing to freshen our indoor air in Unalaska/Dutch Harbor?

We have all heard the "bad" aspects of Tobacco use. Smoking is deadly and deadly addicting. We all know this. Statistics show us in Alaska, 600 deaths per year occur from tobacco-attributable disease. This is five times as many deaths as those caused by motor vehicle crashes, and nearly 100 times as many deaths as those caused by AIDS. It is now predictable what health care problems you will develop based on whether you smoke 10, 20 or 30 cigarettes per day.

If that doesn't get your attention, enter the "ugly". Smoking is the No.1 cause of a lung condition known as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or COPD. COPD makes people who have died from smoking the fortunate ones because they don't have to live with this disease. COPD was once described to me as a condition that makes an individual constantly crave air. But when a breath is taken, it's like breathing in through a spaghetti- thin straw - it's not enough air and it takes too long to breathe it in. Buttoning a shirt becomes an exhaustive task. No wonder depression is more prevalent in lung disease sufferers than any others.

What you might not know is three million Americans quit every year. Quitting isn't easy but it's not impossible. If you don't know where to begin, let me tell you there are many ways, including patches, online personalized smoking cessation help, acupuncture, all of the above or none of the above. Some people have simply not picked up another cigarette and succeeded. And if you have tried and didn't succeed, take heart your chances of succeeding get better every time you try.