



Public Health Interventions to Reduce the Incidence of Tobacco Associated Cancers

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DEAR EDITOR,

Tobacco is a dependence producing substance and accounts for the death of more than 6 million people worldwide every year, of which more than 0.6 million are nonsmokers dying from breathing second-hand smoke.^[1] Worldwide, close to 12% of all deaths among adults aged 30 years and above has been attributed to the consumption of tobacco in any form with maximum deaths being reported in the American and European region.^[2] The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that the prevalence of smoking among world's population above 15 years of age was almost 22%.^[3] In addition, approximately, 250 million adults consume smokeless tobacco in the WHO South-East Asia Region alone.^[4]

Worldwide, tobacco is consumed in different forms such as cigarette, bidi, cigar, chillum, and smokeless tobacco.^[4,5] Consumption of tobacco is not only associated with the development of multiple systemic side effect and metabolic complications but even development of cancers.^[5] In fact, it has been estimated that tobacco smoke contains more than potential 40 hazardous chemicals, which can lead to the development of cancer.^[4,5] Even from the prognosis point of view, a high incidence of complications have been reported subsequent to surgical management among tobacco users.^[6] In addition, tobacco leads to a significant burden on the health care delivery system and roughly accounts for more than half a trillion dollars of economic damage every year.^[1]

However, multiple challenges such as poor awareness among people about different health-related adverse consequences, development of the malignancy after a prolonged period of exposure, limited sensitization of the medical fraternity regarding early detection, and

scarcity in the number of trained healthcare professionals have been identified, which interfere with routine prevention and control activities.^[1,4] In addition, other factors such as limited number of institutes, which offers comprehensive cancer-related care; minimal efforts by the outreach workers to promote tobacco quitting, poor communication skills of health professionals, no streamlined mechanism to increase awareness about tobacco in school settings, and absence of statutory warnings on tobacco products marketed in local areas have also played a crucial role.^[1,2,5,7] Further, poor implementation of the existing legislative measures, extensive opposition from the tobacco manufacturing companies, and poor commitment from the policy makers to ban the consumption of tobacco products, universally, has also interfered with the implementation of the tobacco control services.^[1,5,7,8]

The WHO has projected that in the absence of implementation of "Framework Convention into National Tobacco Control Programs," tobacco will account for the death of almost one billion people in this century, worldwide.^[1] Thus, it is the responsibility of the policy makers and concerned stakeholders to prioritize this issue, and hence develop a comprehensive strategy to not only target the potential risk factors but even address the identified challenges.^[2,5,7] The strategy should consists of multiple elements, namely creating awareness among people regarding the adverse consequences of tobacco consumption and necessity of periodic assessment,^[5] developing a mechanism to monitor tobacco use and prevention policies,^[1] strengthening of the health care delivery system,^[2] ensuring uniform distribution of cancer institute's across the country,^[1,2] implementing steps to protect people from tobacco smoke,^[1] and sensitizing medical practitioners about their immense role in encouraging people to quit tobacco.^[2] Further, measures such as enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion

and sponsorship,^[1,5] raising tax on tobacco products,^[1,7] exploring options for national and international coordination,^[5] and promoting research to increase the understanding about the natural history of different tobacco associated malignancies, can also play a major role in the global fight against tobacco.^[1,2,5]

In conclusion, tobacco remains one of the key etiological agents in the causation of multiple cancers, and thus it is high time to adopt a holistic strategy to bring about a significant reduction in the incidence of tobacco-induced cancers.

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