

Shall nurses take up the anti-smoking banner?

Registered nurses spend direct time with clients. They are also the largest group of health professionals in Minnesota, practicing in numerous settings and reaching diverse client groups, including populations that are uninsured and underinsured.

With the right preparation and motivation, could RNs help to significantly reduce tobacco use among Minnesotans?

Brenda Lenz believes they could and should. An associate professor of nursing science, Lenz has chaired St. Cloud State University's Department of Nursing Science since 2006.

"I've worked as a district school nurse and witnessed firsthand the illness and health effects that tobacco causes," said Lenz, adding that by expanding the list of health professionals who can effectively provide tobacco dependency treatment to include RNs, the numbers of clients served will increase.

According to the most current statistics available from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 18.3 percent of Minnesota's adults smoke cigarettes and 2.3 percent use smokeless tobacco. Across the United States, cigarette smoking remains the leading preventable cause of death, accounting for approximately one of every five or 438,000 deaths each year.



In spring 2006, Lenz proposed a two and a half year research project regarding nursing students' tobacco-related instruction and the perceived barriers and benefits of nurses delivering tobacco-related information and cessation interventions to clients.

"This research is to make sure nursing students in Minnesota are doing their part and making a difference," she said.

ClearWay Minnesota granted Lenz \$120,000 to carry out the project. Created in 1998 as the Minnesota Partnership for Action Against Tobacco, ClearWay's mission is to reduce tobacco use and secondhand smoke.

During the first year of the project, Lenz devised a multi-method survey using three different samples to ensure a thorough and valid understanding of the current situation:

- A descriptive program survey was mailed to all directors of Minnesota's baccalaureate nursing programs to examine the type and extent of tobacco use education and the type and extent of tobacco cessation education among their programs.
- A second survey was mailed to all 777 seniors from Minnesota's 12 baccalaureate nursing programs to examine their knowledge of tobacco use, dependence and cessation and what barriers and benefits they perceived to delivering tobacco intervention to clients.
- A qualitative focus group design was also used to sample the barriers and benefits perceived by nursing faculty in teaching tobacco intervention to nursing students.

Data collected and analyzed thus far reveal that approximately 8 percent of the senior nursing students considered themselves smokers; however 17.4 percent reported using tobacco in the past 30 days. In addition, an analysis of variance revealed a significant difference between smokers and non-smokers regarding their belief that as a nurse, it is one's professional responsibility to help smokers quit.

Lenz said that when the project is complete, her findings will be disseminated among the Minnesota baccalaureate nursing faculty and administration. It will also serve as groundwork for conversations with the Minnesota Board of Nursing regarding a change in nursing licensing requirements to add tobacco cessation as a Board of Nursing Competency or Ability.

Her project will likely provide the data necessary to develop, strengthen or support tobacco cessation instruction in Minnesota's nursing programs, thereby improving the quantity and quality of cessation services for Minnesota residents, she said.

Lenz also plans to submit a request to present her findings at the annual conference for baccalaureate nursing faculty sponsored by the American Association of College Nursing (AACN) in the fall of 2008. 🐾

Staff writer John Yebamaram contributed to this story.