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American Dental Association

Telephone 'quitlines' may help dental patients stop smoking

CHICAGO, May 25, 2007 -- Dentists may be able to help their patients stop smoking by referring them to tobacco-use telephone "quit lines," according to a pilot study published in the May issue of The Journal of the American Dental Association (JADA).

Dentists who intervene with patients to help them stop using tobacco can play a significant role in decreasing tobacco-related illness and death. However, providing support for such patients requires time and resources that oral health care professionals may not always have. So, researchers at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, Rochester, Minn., identified the need to conduct a pilot study to evaluate whether the speedier measure of referring patients to tobacco-use quitlines was also effective in helping patients stop smoking.

The authors randomly assigned eight general dental practices in Minnesota to provide either brief counseling regarding smoking cessation or brief counseling along with referrals to a tobacco-use quitline for patients who reported that they were currently smoking cigarettes.

Of 82 patients, 60 were referred to the tobacco-use quitline and 22 received only brief counseling. At six months, 25 percent of the patients in the quitline group and 27.3 percent of the patients in the brief-counseling group had abstained from tobacco use. Abstinence rates among patients in the quitline group rose if those patients completed more telephone consultations.

The authors cite research indicating that although more than 60 percent of dentists believe their patients do not expect tobacco-use cessation services from them, about 59 percent of patients believe that dentists should provide such services.

"By facilitating engagement in a tobacco-use quitline," the authors write, "dental practitioners can close the gap between patients' expectations and the current standard of practice."

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JADA, a monthly journal, is the ADA's flagship publication and the best-read scientific journal in dentistry.

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