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Christie Sain: Tar Wars can help you break the habit

Christie Sain

My View

Re: "Tobacco tax worries retailers" (news article, June 30).

It seems the focus has turned from the dangers of smoking to whether local retailers will suffer from the recent increased cigarette tax.

As the new tax is stamped on packs of cigarettes, the possibility of smuggling them into Florida becomes a reality. However, we cannot ignore the benefits this tax will have on our young people and on those trying to quit smoking.

As the state coordinator for the Florida Academy of Family Physicians' Tar Wars program, I volunteer my time organizing programs that teach fourth- and fifth-graders about the consequences of tobacco use. All around the state, we are providing these young people with the tools they need for making positive decisions about their health and to remain tobacco free.

The American Lung Association states that 90 percent of smokers begin smoking before the age of 21. The association hopes that the new cigarette tax will deter young people from ever picking up that first cigarette.

Another benefit of the increased tobacco use surcharge is that more people are now deciding to quit. But even the higher price of cigarettes may not be enough. Without proven, effective smoking-cessation methods, smokers may feel forced to get around the new tax by crossing state lines to buy cigarettes or by ordering cigarettes online.

According to the American Stroke Association, only 7 percent of smokers will quit on their own, and, on average, it takes a smoker six to nine attempts to quit successfully. If you've made the decision to quit, congratulations! The good news is, there are tools that can help. The bad news is, many health plans do not provide adequate benefits for cessation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following coverage for smoking cessation:

- Paying for counseling and medications, together or separately.
- Providing counseling and medication coverage for at least two smoking-cessation attempts per year.
- Covering at least four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes each.

- Eliminating or minimizing co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications.

According to the American Cancer Society, smoking is associated with increased risk for at least 15 types of cancer, and it is a major cause of heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Talk to your physician about quitting. Get the help you need.

Through Tar Wars and other tobacco-prevention programs, we will continue to strive to keep kids from ever smoking that first cigarette, but we also need to have adequate cessation coverage for current smokers. It's time to stop this deadly addiction.

Additional Facts

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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