Global Health Matters

This article by Myung et al. from the Center for Cancer Prevention and Detection, National Cancer Center, Goyang, Korea, demonstrates the importance of smoking cessation programs and reminds us that the successes and the obstacles are similar in almost any global setting.¹ This study also reminds us that more is better, meaning that proactive and intense follow-up yields higher success for the participants who are trying to quit. It is rather striking that smoking rates in Korean men are an order of magnitude higher than Korean women.

The researchers employed traditional and novel methods, including the use of the 9030 telephone line that was easy to remember and had a connection to the cessation efforts. Like many successful cessation programs, it was important to make the program in Korea highly desirable and convenient to the patients by offering convenient hours, methods that preserve privacy, and realistic expectations for the participants, including allowing them to restart or repeat the program. The study is modest in size and has some limitations, but it is important because it does demonstrate the importance of these programs, the universality of the obstacles that face smokers in their attempts to quit, and the challenges to researchers and clinicians in implementing cessation programs.

Korea, like most of the developed world, continues to limit smoking in public places, including workplaces, dining establishments, and commercial settings. The participants in this study are the workforce for this country, most are between 20 and 50 years of age, and more than half of the participants have a college education. These qualities are good in that the citizens of this age group and this education level are participating, but it also brings to mind that the less educated population, which has similar smoking rates, still needs to be reached.

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AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF THE KOREAN PROACTIVE QUITLINE SERVICE FOR SMOKING CESSATION AND RELAPSE PREVENTION

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As a smoking cessation strategy, a quitline service has been known to be effective in helping smokers in several countries (e.g., Australia, Sweden, United States, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and Hong Kong) quit smoking.¹⁻⁶ It can provide convenient smoking cessation services to smokers who need help and are reluctant to undergo face-to-face counseling, is effective with diverse populations, and has a broad reach.^{3,7} Also, a randomized controlled trial showed that telephone counseling as an adjunct to nicotine replacement therapy by transdermal patch significantly

increased 90-day continuous abstinence rates at six months compared with pharmacological treatment alone.⁸

In general, a quitline service uses two approaches. In a proactive approach, a trained counselor telephones the smoker to provide support in initiating a quit attempt and maintaining prolonged abstinence. In a reactive approach, users obtain information or assistance by telephoning the quitline.^{9,10} A meta-analysis of telephone counseling for smoking cessation reported that three or more calls of intensive, proactive telephone counseling increased the odds of quitting, compared with minimal intervention such as brief advice or the provision of self-help materials.⁹

A quitline service could be especially effective for helping smokers in Korea quit smoking. Korea is a country with a very high smoking prevalence among men—one of the highest worldwide—with 46.6% of Korean men compared with 4.6% of Korean women smoking in 2005.¹¹ The total population of smokers in Korea is estimated to be about 10 million. No quitline service or research was implemented in Korea until