

Understanding teen attitudes critical to quit message

Teen attitudes to smoking need to be re-examined if anti-smoking health campaigns are to be effective, according to Hunter researchers.

Researchers from the Centre for Health Research and Psycho-oncology (CHeRP) have reviewed 78 international studies, drawing some important conclusions about adolescent smoking and peer pressure, sales-to-minor laws, and young people's views on nicotine addiction. Flora Tzelepis from CHeRP said the review concentrated on information from focus groups and interviews with young people.

“In relation to peer pressure, teenagers rarely identify bullying or teasing as coercive factors that lead to smoking,” Ms Tzelepis said. “The desire to fit in with the group is far more influential and pervasive and this is what needs to be tackled in education programs rather than the simplistic ‘Just say no’ type of message.

“It is clear that tough laws are unlikely to stop young people from obtaining tobacco products, with young people reporting a number of ways of getting around these restrictions. This suggests that governments should not invest too heavily in enforcing sales-to-minors laws in the belief they will play a major part in stopping young people from smoking.

“Disturbingly, mid-teens experimenting with tobacco tend to see cigarette addiction as something which happens to older people. Older teens who smoke regularly can readily accept they are addicted, but this realisation frequently comes too late for such an entrenched addiction.”

Ms Tzelepis said she hoped the findings, published in the journal *Substance Use & Misuse*, would help shape future education programs and other government efforts designed to tackle the substantial future health problems arising from adolescent smoking.

Source: Research Australia

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