

Quit smoking message not getting air time in mental health care

People with mental illness are not receiving the support they need to stop smoking, despite high rates of nicotine dependence and deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses.

According to Professor Steve Kisely, from Griffith University's School of Medicine, health services are failing to provide appropriate smoking cessation strategies to people with problems including depression, schizophrenia or post-traumatic stress disorder.

He said smoking rates in people with mental illness were twice the rates in the general population.

“Deaths from largely preventable diseases including cancer and cardiovascular disease outnumber deaths from suicide in psychiatric patients by ten to one. There is a forgotten epidemic of physical illness in the mentally ill - another example of the inequities in our health system.”

In a recent review of the medical evidence for smoking interventions in mental illness, Professor Kisley said health professionals were not routinely including smoking status in patient treatment plans, encouraging smokers to quit, referring them for counselling or offering effective drug therapies.

Yet the literature review found that a combination of long term pharmacotherapy and psychological interventions for smoking cessation were as effective in people with mental illness as they were in the general population.

“These people can spend up to 40 per cent of their income on cigarettes and are significantly disadvantaged by their smoking. Smoking may also interfere with other medications they are taking and increase the risk of adverse side effects,” he said.

Professor Kisely said the most effective treatments for smoking cessation were a combination of psychological treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy and nicotine replacement therapies or other prescription medicines such as bupropion (Zyban).

The study also concluded that treatment to stop smoking would be more effective when integrated into patients' overall mental health care.

Source: Research Australia

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