

Title of Research Smoking Cessation Among the Homeless--A Community-Based Intervention

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Abstract

Objective or Hypothesis

The goal of my project is to learn more about the opinions of homeless shelter staff and guest with regards to smoking cessation efforts. I seek to identify successful and unsuccessful strategies for assisting homeless St. Paul residents to quit smoking. I want to identify shelter staff priorities regarding smoking cessation efforts of their guests, and staff desires (or lack thereof) for increased interventions. I seek to implement those strategies or processes that are identified by guests and by shelter staff as feasible, low-cost, sustainable, and most likely to be beneficial. I hypothesize that these conversations will lead to a more sustainable variety of options for those homeless residents who do smoke and desire to quit.

Population

The population that I worked with throughout this study was the homeless population of St. Paul that uses The Listening House drop-in resource shelter on a regular basis.

Methods

I first conducted a literature review on topics involving smoking cessation both in general populations and among the homeless. I then compiled a database of existing resources for those that desire to quit smoking. Focus groups were held at The Listening House, a drop-in shelter and resource facility located next door to Dorothy Day Homeless Shelter. I had three focus groups with homeless guests, asking the same questions at each. The dialogue from each was transcribed and then analyzed, identifying themes, emotions, and trends from each. Those results were then conveyed to a final focus group held with shelter staff, which also included a discussion of shelter staff views and priorities on assisting their homeless guest desires to stop abusing tobacco.

Main Results

The focus groups with homeless guests revealed very powerful themes of addiction, hopelessness, and deep-rooted reasons for continuing to use tobacco. There was strong knowledge of the damaging impact of cigarettes and a moderate amount of misinformation about the effectiveness of various quit strategies. There was widespread disregard for previous smoking cessation research efforts that had been conducted at The Listening House, and a desire for a guest-led quit smoking support group.

The focus groups with the shelter staff revealed an honest recognition of the many difficulties of daily life for shelter guests, and the realistic need to prioritize housing, mental health, and legal concerns above those of quitting smoking. The staff were conflicted on how much energy to put into assisting their guests with quitting smoking given their past failed experiences. The shelter staff were supportive of low-cost, sustainable interventions that the shelter could take ownership of, and those that their guests had identified as most likely to help them quit smoking.

Conclusions

Motivating homeless residents to quit smoking is complex and traditionally has low success rates. An accurate needs assessment in this case revealed a different set of strategies than have been offered in other homeless resident smoking cessation research studies. This community-based project left both homeless residents and shelter staff feeling validated and empowered.

IRB Approval X **HIPAA Compliance** X **Mentor(s)** Katie Guthrie, MD

Funding Sources MAFP Foundation Family Medicine Resident Research Grant

This scholarly work is funded by the Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians Foundation and the American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation.