

SMOKING CESSATION AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF THE LAW BANNING SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES IN ITALY: A ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP STUDY

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Tobacco smoking is the first removable cause of illness and premature mortality in the world. In Italy nicotine dependent subjects are about 12 million, 24.3% of the population (1). As of January 10, 2005, Italian law bans smoking in all indoor public places. The aim of the present study was to evaluate the impact of this restriction on the rate of success among subjects enrolled in a program of smoking cessation. From January 2004 to December 2005, 245 (124 in 2004 and 121 in 2005) volunteers motivated to quit smoking (45.3% males, 54.7% females, average age 47.7 ± 10.5 yrs and smoking an average of 24.0 ± 10.6 cigarettes/day) were recruited by our Unit. After an individual motivational interview, patients started a Six-week Group Counseling Program (SGCP) for smoking cessation and were asked to begin a seven week pharmacotherapy consisting of 300 mg Bupropion SR/daily (BT) (2). The amount of exhaled carbon monoxide was taken as a measure of abstinence; counselors called in the patients after 3, 6 and 12 months to check their smoking habit. The majority of the subjects were in their late forties, had a high school education and regular employment and more than 90% had a family history of tobacco smoking. There was no significant difference between those enrolled in 2004 and 2005, except that subjects enrolled in 2005 had higher nicotine dependence as per the results of the Severity of Dependence Scale (10.2 ± 2.3 vs. 9.4 ± 2.1 ; $P < 0.01$). About one-third of the subjects accepted BT, while the remaining chose SGCP only. Subjects enrolled after the introduction of the law (i.e. 2005) showed a significantly higher smoking cessation rate, as compared with those enrolled in 2004, at the short-term follow-up, at the end of the SGCP (82% vs. 64%, $P < 0.01$) and at the three-month follow-up (75% vs. 51%, $P < 0.05$). Their rate of abstinence was higher, but not significantly, at the six-month follow-up (57% vs. 51%) and at the one-year follow-up (53% vs. 45%). In conclusion our data suggests that the introduction of smoke-free legislation and change in *public opinion* have contributed in reducing the smoking habit.

1. Istat, January 2005.

2. Grassi M.C., Enea D., Marchetti R., Caricati A.M. and Nencini P. (2006) Drug. Dev. Res. 67: 271-279.