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Oklahoma Unified Resources (OUR) Turning Point Coalition Investigates Local Tobacco Issues

Jo Miller, member of the Oklahoma Unified Resources Turning Point Coalition, and an active volunteer for the Western Oklahoma Tobacco Control Program, sat down with Diane Bently, Physician Assistant in Cheyenne, to obtain her perspective on local tobacco issues. When asked what types of smoking related illnesses she sees in her practice, Bently reports that she has seen an increase in pneumonia within the younger population, recently treating 3 females who are smokers. She reports treating ear infections, bronchitis, asthma and allergies in children and she continues to see several cases of COPD and emphysema within the older smoking population. With regards to children, Bently advises smokers to never smoke inside their home. She states that the chemicals from secondhand smoke get trapped inside clothing, hair, skin, and furniture and can trigger an asthma attack or exacerbate allergy symptoms. Bently states "if a smoker cannot or will not quit smoking, it is imperative that they smoke outside their homes and wash their hands, especially when handling small children. I even knew a woman who would wear a smoking jacket outside so the chemicals would not penetrate her clothing, which is a great thing, but it can still get in your hair." Bently also reports feeling strongly about smoking in a car with children, stating "just because a window is cracked doesn't mean that all of the smoke is going outside, physical symptoms and even cognitive deficits can be experienced when these children inhale a lot of smoke in a closed-in environment". Miller asked if she sees many pregnant women who smoke, and Bently states that her office does not see many pregnant women, but there's evidence that smoking causes low-birth weight babies and can seriously harm a newborn's lungs and eardrums. There's also a good chance that if you smoke in the home, your children will follow suit. Bently says that although this isn't the case every time, she does see this in her practice. "It's as if these teens think, well if Mom and/or Dad do it then its okay." She says that there are some teens that she has spoken with who claim they will never smoke because they don't want their hair to stink or their fingernails and teeth to turn yellow. When Miller asked Bently about her perspective on spit tobacco usage in this area, she replies that it is definitely used a lot in Western Oklahoma by both men and women, but is far more prevalent in men. She has known people to begin using it on occasion and before they know it they are up to 1-2 cans per day. She reports that darkened gums that pull away from the teeth, staining of the teeth and oral cancer are some of the results of spit tobacco use. Bently states "it not uncommon to see young boys using spit tobacco and even seems to be a rite of passage. Though it doesn't affect others around you, it's important for people to know that it is still a dangerous product and equally addictive as cigarettes." Speaking of addiction Bently does recognize that nicotine addiction is not an easy thing to quit. She states that she always tries to counsel to her patients and give them knowledge and available resources, but she never judges them because she is aware of the magnitude of nicotine addiction. Anyone looking for free tobacco cessation services can call the Oklahoma Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-Quit-Now.