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Editorial**The role of health professionals in tobacco cessation and control**

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Tobacco is the only consumer product that kills half its users when used as the manufacturer intends. Tobacco deaths rarely make headlines or cannot fit into the category of 'breaking news' in the popular prime time media. But the situation if thought of meticulously is alarming. Tobacco kills one person every six seconds.¹ Tobacco kills a third to half of all people who use it, on an average 15 years prematurely.^{2,3} Presently tobacco use causes 1 in 10 deaths among adults worldwide- more than five million people a year.⁴ By 2030, unless urgent action is taken, tobacco's annual death toll will rise to more than eight million.⁴ In comparison tobacco-related deaths will exceed the total number of deaths from malaria, maternal and major childhood conditions, and tuberculosis combined. More than three fourth of these deaths are predicted to occur in the developing world, where dreams of a better life are only just beginning to unfold among the masses.⁵ The burden will not just be in terms of death and illness but also reduced productivity and increasing health-care costs. As scientific research continues to show the negative impact of tobacco consumption on health raising the number of people affected, the list of conditions caused by tobacco consumption has grown. Apart from the usual suspects, carcinoma of the lungs, oesophagus, larynx, mouth and throat, chronic pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases, and damage to the reproductive system, now it also has some association with cataracts, pneumonia, acute myeloid leukaemia, abdominal aortic aneurysm, stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer, cervical cancer, kidney cancer, periodontitis and

other diseases.⁶ Tobacco not only affects those who consume it, millions of people, including one half of the world's children, are exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke, known also as passive smoking.⁷

Health professionals have a vital role to play in tobacco control. They have the trust of the population, the media, and leaders who are in position to legislate opinion. Their voices are heard across a vast range of social, economic and political arenas. At the personal level, they can educate the population on the evils of tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke. They can also help tobacco users overcome their addiction. At the community level, health professionals can be initiators or supporters of the policies pertaining to control and cessation of tobacco usage. At the society level, health professionals can add their voice and their weight to national and global tobacco control efforts like tax increase campaigns and become involved at the national level in promoting the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In addition, health professional organizations can show leadership and become a role model for other professional organizations and society by embracing the tenants of the Health Professional Code of Practice on Tobacco Control. At their professional level they can show by example that they can not only preach regarding the tobacco control they can also curb tobacco usage in their own professional community. The important factor that has deterred the active involvement of health professionals in tobacco cessation is the

use of tobacco in their own community. A cross-sectional survey carried out in 2006 among 110 male faculty of medical schools, 229 physicians and 1130 medical students in Kerala, India, 15.1% of the faculty, 13.1% of physicians and 14.1% of medical students reported current tobacco use. When only males are considered, the proportion becomes much higher. While 42% of the faculty and physicians and 51% of the medical students had not made any attempt to quit smoking, a third of the faculty and physicians and 16% of medical students had attempted to quit at least four times.⁸

We, health professionals, need to positively help others to quit tobacco use by setting a good example. We, ourselves, shouldn't be victims of tobacco use of any form. We should be good role models to the rest of the society thus encouraging tobacco cessation and control.

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