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**Northern
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Media release

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Hospitals help patients kick the habit

Hospitals throughout Northwestern Ontario are now better primed to help patients who want to butt out. Recent in-service training by researchers Dr. Pat Smith and Dr. Scott Sellick will assist nurses to implement bedside smoking cessation programs for patients. Dr. Smith trained approximately 120 nurses and other healthcare providers in 6 days of regional travel covering 3,000 kilometers.

“Our extensive research demonstrates that people who are hospitalized want to quit smoking,” explains Dr. Pat Smith, Associate Professor, Northern Ontario School of Medicine. “This training program is part of a system of tools designed to reach smokers when they are most willing to quit and most likely to succeed in their attempt. People who quit smoking during hospitalization have significantly higher quit rates than the general population.”

Funding by the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation enabled this research into disease prevention and tobacco cessation. Because Northwestern Ontario has some of the highest risk factors for, and rates of, chronic disease, the research focused on the primary preventable cause of death and disability – smoking.

Drs. Smith and Sellick conducted an assessment to determine the tools that would help patients quit smoking and the resources clinicians needed to inform and support patients. Their findings enabled them to develop an extensive package to assist hospitals implement smoking cessation programs for patients, including procedures and training guidelines for healthcare providers. Smith and Sellick recently provided in-service training for nurses at ten regional hospitals.

Now, when patients throughout Northwestern Ontario are admitted to hospitals, nurses will provide them with information and resources in a short bed-side intervention. Such an intervention is recommended by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario as well as the Ontario Medical Association. Previously, regional clinicians did not have the resources required to implement the intervention. Included in the program is the opportunity for patients to receive follow-up support via telephone calls from the Smokers Help Line.

Regional hospitals have responded to the program with enthusiasm. “With this training and the right information and tools, our nurses are now prepared to provide smoking cessation assistance to our patients,” says Lori Maki, Vice President Clinical Services, Riverside Healthcare Facilities. “Our goal is to help patients make healthy choices to prevent further disease or deterioration.”

Smoking rates of Northwestern Ontario’s general population are higher than the provincial average, and the rates for people admitted to hospital are even higher. Research indicates that up to 50% of inpatients want help to quit smoking and the rate climbs to 80% for cardiac patients. Without hospitalization, less than 1% of smokers seek quitting assistance.

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“Hospitalization creates a window of opportunity for smokers,” explains Smith. “In one of our recent clinical trials, a one- to three-minute bedside intervention by a nurse resulted in up to 50% of cardiac patients quitting smoking.” Several factors contribute to the success of the bedside intervention, including:

- Patients are more aware that smoking is harming them (tobacco smoke is often directly related to the hospitalization)
- Patients are removed from their regular routines and familiar cues to light up
- When they are sick, people are less inclined to smoke
- Many patients temporarily quit during hospitalization because of smoking bans and will undergo the worst withdrawal within the first 2-3 days so the hard part is over quickly; most don't even notice any withdrawal symptoms.

The new program will be available in every hospital in Northwestern Ontario, with the potential to reach thousands of individuals. Glenn Craig, president & CEO of the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation, praises Dr. Smith and Dr. Sellick for their intensive research and program implementation work. “This program will help battle cancer, cardiac disease and countless other illnesses that claim the lives of our family, friends and neighbours,” he says. The Health Sciences Foundation provided \$270,000.00 to fund the research.

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation raises funds in support of excellence for the people of Northwestern Ontario. 100% of all funds raised stay in Northwestern Ontario.

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