

Overview of Smoking Cessation Services in Singapore.

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I Introduction:

- Tobacco dependence is a serious public health concern. Physicians, healthcare providers and specialists often refer smokers to smoking cessation programs/clinics.
- Community and media-based cessation programs have been able to reach a large number of smokers but lack effectiveness¹.
- On the other hand, intensive, multi-session clinical interventions have been found to achieve relatively high long-term abstinence rates² but their reach is limited.
- Some studies have found that smoking cessation clinics have a limited impact on population in reducing cessation rates. Some have even advocated abandoning the clinic approach to cessation³.
- In Singapore, we wanted to ascertain information such as who refers smokers to the smoking cessation clinics, how many smokers enroll in cessation programs, type of program, what intervention programs are practiced at these clinics, if the effect of the interventions is evaluated and what is the quit rate.

II Objective:

To provide an overview of current smoking cessation services for adult (age ≥ 21 years) smokers in Singapore.

III Method:

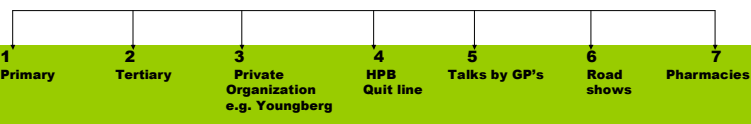
- Information was gathered from the internet on smoking cessation services offered by government polyclinics, hospitals, the Singapore Cancer Society, the Health Promotion Board (HPB), private pharmacies and other organizations from the public domain. More in-depth information was obtained by interviewing nurse managers at these clinics via phone, e-mail and in person.
- Information sought included: sources of referral, number of smokers enrolled, intervention programs offered (e.g. medication, counseling) and fees charged. In addition, clinics were queried as to whether they evaluated/monitored their programs and interventions periodically and what their quit rates were.

Limitation:

With regard to public healthcare institutions, we approached only hospitals and polyclinics attached to SingHealth.

IV Results:

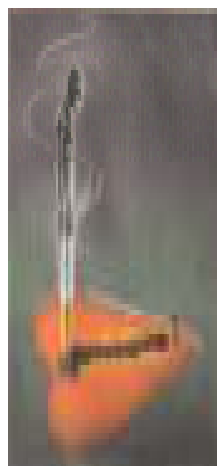
Smoking cessation (SC) services in Singapore are offered through a multitude of programs.



Details of the services offered by the above mentioned organizations are given below.

	1. Primary	2. Secondary/Tertiary	3. Youngberg Wellness Center's 9 month smoking cessation program.
	Polyclinics Total 9 polyclinics of SingHealth Cluster only.	Singapore General Hospital (SGH)	Changi General Hospital (CGH)
Type of clinic	Smoking Cessation	Smoking Cessation	Pharmacy
No of patients/week:	About 1 to 2 patients/week	About 1 to 2 patients/week	2 to 3 patients/week
Fees \$:	\$4/session	\$82/3 individual sessions	Free of charge
Duration of counseling	15 to 20 minutes	30 – 45 minutes	30 – 40 minutes
Who counsels?	Nurses	Psychologists / Pharmacists	Pharmacists
Who trains counselors?	Trained by HPB		Alexandra Hospital
Who refers?	Doctors from polyclinics	Doctors from Heart, Respiratory Centre & Critical Care Medicine	Doctors from CGH
Type of counseling	Individual	Individual and group sessions	Individual
Type of treatment	Counseling, Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)	Counseling, behavioral therapy, pharmacologic intervention	Counseling, Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT)
Do you undertake regular follow up of patients?	No	No	Follow up of patients is done by calling them until they quit.
Do patients follow appointment timing?	Patients do not regularly follow their scheduled appointments.	Patients do not regularly follow their scheduled appointments.	Mostly yes. Sometimes they are late.
Do patients receive reminders?	No.	No	Yes. One day prior to the appointment.

Conducted by trained GPs, psychologists.
 Group of 10 – 15 People.
 Age: 21 to 50 years
 90% Male
 Once /week
 4 face to face sessions.
 4 weeks apart
 2 face to face follow up sessions (each)
 After 3 months each
 2 Phone calls.
 Quit rate is approximately 20 to 50% by the end of the nine month program.



4. Toll free quit line by HPB:
 Service is conducted only over the phone.
 Operating hours:
 Weekdays: 8.30am to 5.00pm
 Saturdays: 8.30am to 1.00pm.
 Program offers: support and advice by using follow up phone calls.
 The quit advisors are trained nurses.
 Number of calls received /month during Campaign periods: 400 to 500
 Non Campaign periods: about 200.
 Quit rate: 12% /year
 Vs
 2 to 3% self quit rate/year

5. Talks on smoking cessation:
 Few GP's conduct talks at various Corporate & Government offices. These talks are free for employees.
6. Road shows:
 Conducted at -HDB hubs -Industries or -Shopping centers
 Treatment - NRT - Advice - Quit fix (self management tool)
 Advice is given free of charge by trained pharmacists.

7. Smoking cessation program handled by the pharmacies

Pharmacy Information	Unity	Guardian	Watson	NTUC Healthcare
Number of outlets offering service	5	About 18	6	9
Number of people who are counseled per month at the pharmacy.	20 – 30	About 10	About 10 depending on the outlet.	No data available. Varies from pharmacy to pharmacy.
% of men who come for counseling.	90%	90%	96%	
Average age (years) of those who come for counseling.	30 – 50	>30 years	30 to 45 years	
Ethnicity	Mostly Chinese.	Generally more Caucasians but in some locations other races may be more prevalent for eg. more Malays at the Bedok outlet.	50% Chinese, remaining 50% were Malays than Indians & Others.	
Are the pharmacists trained to counsel a smoker? (None of them are psychologists)	Yes, one day workshop by HPB.	Yes, in-house or by HPB or Youngberg.	From HPB.	Yes, from HPB.
Is the counseling given in group or individual sessions?	Individual: face to face.	Individual and group.	Individual.	Individual and one-time talks for corporate staff.
What intervention program do you follow?	One time counseling.	One time.	One time counseling only.	Counseling. Usually follow up not done unless customer requests.
Do you charge fees for counseling?	No, it is totally free. In addition they give them some gifts vouchers sponsored by Nicorette company.	Counseling is free for those who walk in for consultation. When companies approach for consultation, they are charged \$ 60 /person for one face to face and followed up by phone for 30-45mins. Group (of 10): Total fees \$200. For 1to 2 hour long sessions.	Free.	No charge presently for brief counseling which is for 10 – 15 mins. First time \$15 for 45 minutes; \$ 80 for 2 nd time. Company bears charges for talks.
Do you go for Road shows*?	Yes	Yes		
Do you get a better response at Road shows?	Yes. Above 100. One person counsels 20 to 30 people. Usually they have 5 employees who can counsel.	Yes, more than 50.		

Summary:

- Smoking cessation services were relatively under-utilized at polyclinics and public hospitals, with each site attending to ≤5 patients/ month. This could be due to limited opening hours (clinics are opened once a week for only 2 hours) and fees charged for their services.
- On the other hand, the HPB Quit line, which operates full office hours throughout the week, receives > 200 calls /month. Private pharmacies which open from 8.30am to 9pm every day and offer free consultations see 20 – 30 smokers /month per outlet.
- Few services followed up their clients and routinely tracked their quit rates.

Conclusion:

- The relative popularity of the HPB toll-free quit line and private pharmacies may be due to extended hours of service and absence of charges. Private pharmacies may be able to play a larger role in smoking cessation efforts, especially in collaboration with the HPB Quit line.
- There is a need to track the success rates of the various services which can guide the choice of services offered.

References:

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