UA Researchers Look at Optimizing Smoking Cessation Services for Women

Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health
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**Uma Nair** [1] is well-versed in smoking and its effects on women and their families.

The assistant professor of practice in the **Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health** [2] has researched postpartum depression among smokers, the effects of secondhand smoke in infants and toddlers, and the use of physical activity to help people quit smoking. Her work focuses on low-income and at-risk populations.

Nair will continue her research on smoking with a project in which she and her colleagues will investigate the effects of women's menstrual cycles on smoking cessation outcomes. Nair is co-principal investigator of the new study, along with **Alicia Allen** [3], assistant professor in the **Department of Family and Community Medicine** [4].

The study will explore how the timing of a quit date during the menstrual cycle may improve smoking cessation rates among women using a combination of telephone-based behavioral counseling and nicotine replacement therapy. The study is funded by a $347,000 two-year grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health.

The researchers will enroll 116 women between 18 and 40 years of age from the **Arizona Smokers' Helpline** [5], known as ASHLine, a free phone and online resource. The "quitline" has been helping Arizonans quit smoking and using tobacco since 1995. ASHLine is located in the College of Public Health and is funded by state tax on tobacco products.

"Essentially, we are taking the quitline model and tailoring it to the specific needs of premenopausal women," said Nair, who is also assistant director of ASHLine.

The study participants will receive four weeks of nicotine replacement therapy in the form of a patch, which can help relieve some of the physical withdrawal symptoms, and six weeks of telephone-based behavioral counseling. The women also will track their menstrual cycle while they are in the study.

"We know that craving and withdrawal can vary across the menstrual cycle, but we don't yet know if targeting a specific menstrual cycle phase to quit smoking will help women quit," Allen said.

Allen, a behavioral epidemiologist who researches addictive behaviors in women, said women are more likely than men to experience smoking-related illness and death. Women also are the primary source of secondhand smoke exposure for children.
Nair said that quitlines like ASHLine have become standard care for smoking cessation. Every state in the nation has a quitline, as do Puerto Rico and Guam.

"Quitlines are highly successful, broad-reaching and cost-effective programs that disseminate smoking cessation treatment. Yet little research has explored how to optimize and individualize quitline services for women," Nair said.

"The results of this study will directly inform future research on quitline smoking cessation interventions for women of reproductive age, including a full-scale clinical trial. If successful, this model can be cost-effectively replicated within quitlines nationally," Nair added.

For more information about the study, contact Nair and Allen at ProjectPhase@email.arizona.edu.

For information about services and resources available to UA employees who want to quit tobacco, visit Life & Work Connections.

A version of this article originally appeared on the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health website.

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