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Tobacco tax increases will reduce smoking - AGPN

The Government's move to increase tobacco tax and enforce plain packaging for cigarette packs will reduce take up and encourage people to quit smoking and has the wholehearted support of the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) says the Chair, Dr Emil Djakic.

Dr Djakic said evidence supports tax increases on tobacco as a significant motivator for smoking cessation and should be encouraged.

"We know that if we could reduce smoking we would also reduce chronic illnesses like heart and lung diseases and cancer. Not smoking is one of the simplest, easiest and best things a person can do to live a healthy, long life. It's really very simple," Dr Djakic said.

AGPN has been calling for increases in taxation on smoking in recent Budget submissions and endorsed the view that a hip pocket hit was the best medicine for smoking addiction.

Dr Djakic said smoking cessation programs are core business for general practice should be a future role for primary health care organisations (PHCOs) in public health promotion.

"PHCOs might identify a smoking problem in their community and put funding into subsidising nicotine patches, for example. A similar program at a Primary Care Trust in the UK reduced smoking by three percent within a year," he said.

Dr Djakic was encouraged by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd's call for the money raised through the additional tax to go to the National Health and Hospitals Network Fund.

"PHCOs have a clear role to play in health promotion and wellness promotion – the additional funding will be well used in general practice to help patients give up smoking," he said.

General practice is a good place to go for those who are considering giving up smoking.

"Even a brief conversation with a GP has a significant impact on the likelihood of someone reducing or ending their smoking addiction. GPs can help with quit plans and nicotine patches to help people quit," Dr Djakic said.

Dr Djakic said smoking remained a particular problem in Indigenous communities and the rise in young people taking it up was alarming.

"Smoking is a health risk. It impacts your general health, your eyesight and can significantly increase your likelihood of developing cancers and serious heart disease. If that isn't deterrent enough, raising taxes and limiting advertising are other ways we can reduce uptake, as a General Practitioner, I'm 100 percent in support of that," he said.

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