



Media release

One-third of ED patients smoke – higher than NZ national average

One-third of patients attending a hospital emergency department (ED) are smokers, much higher than the rate for the rest of the population.

This is the finding of a six-day study conducted in August 2009 of over 500 patients attending Wellington Hospital Emergency Department.

The study, by emergency registrar Dr Abigail Lynch and emergency physician Dr Paul Quigley, is published in the latest issue of *Emergency Medicine Australasia*, the journal of the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.

This is the first study conducted outside of North America to determine the prevalence of smoking among ED patients.

“We found 33.1% our patient population smoke compared with 20.7% of the general NZ population the majority want to quit,” said Dr Lynch.

“Our results indicate that 74.9% of smokers’ want to quit and, of those wanting to quit, 76.3% took a quit smoking pack and showed an interest in receiving ED-based quit smoking advice.”

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in New Zealand and the world.

It is responsible for the death of 1 in 10 adults worldwide – approximately 5 million deaths each year, 13 500 deaths per day.

In NZ, approximately 5000 deaths each year are attributable to direct or second-hand smoking and those smokers who die from smoking-related illness lose on average 15 years of life compared with non-smokers.

Recent studies have demonstrated that counselling by physicians increases the likelihood that patients will stop smoking.

This is especially true for patients who smoke and who utilise the ED for most or all of their routine health care.

“If smoking is not addressed with these patients during their ED visit, it might not be addressed at all,” Dr Lynch said.

“Seventy-two patients were not registered with a GP and a significant proportion of these patients smoke and would like to quit.

“For these patients the ED might be the only place to obtain physician-based smoking cessation advice.”

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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