

Northwell Center for Tobacco Control Cessation Program: Twenty Years of Innovation and Success

Northwell Health is on the front lines of stopping the leading preventable cause of death and disease—smoking—with an innovative direct tobacco cessation program unlike others across the state.

A part of Health Solutions at Northwell Health, the Center for Tobacco Control offers in-person counseling and access to cessation medication, complemented by a weekly support group and evidence-based relapse prevention strategies—all of which contribute to the Center’s high success rate.

“About 40 percent of the people who go through our program succeed in quitting at the one-year mark,” says Pat Folan, Director of the Center for Tobacco Control, “while most other programs see a success rate of about 28 percent. We credit our success to the consistency of the program—we’ve been doing this for almost 20 years—and the comprehensiveness of our services.”

The program was launched in 1999 by North Shore University Hospital nurses who were committed to reducing tobacco usage among their staff and the greater community. Physicians began sending patients to the program, held on hospital grounds, and the program soon earned the support of hospital administration.

“We also wanted to educate healthcare providers and provide resources for their patients,” Folan says. “As part of our educational component, we work with organizational leaders in behavioral and medical healthcare to help them establish a systematic approach to tobacco control and develop policies that lead to cessation services being offered to their patients.”

Folan notes that the Center concentrates on those with low income and/or behavioral health problems, as these populations smoke at double the rate of the general population. The same is true of Medicaid patients, who may struggle to manage chronic illnesses while using tobacco products.

This public health work is funded by the New York State Department of Health, while the cessation program itself is funded by Northwell. “That’s one of the reasons we’ve maintained this level of success,” Folan explains. “Many other programs offer great care and counseling but lack the support to offer these things consistently.”

The five-week, in-person cessation program is run by nurse practitioners. After completing the program, patients are invited to attend a weekly evening support group with peers who have gone through the process. The program has even expanded to include a text messaging component that bolsters enthusiasm and attendance at the support group.

“It’s about letting them know that they’re important and that we want to help them on this journey,” Folan says. “About 75% of smokers want to quit but think it’s too hard, but if their

healthcare providers can get them through the door and we can keep them engaged—especially with others who have quit—they'll have a much better chance at success.”