

## **MOBILIZING HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS FOR SMOKEFREE INDOOR AIR**

*June 2005*

Healthcare professionals are an important component of almost every smokefree air campaign. Not only do doctors, dentists, nurses, dental hygienists, and healthcare students have a shared interest in promoting and protecting public health, but also many are well-known and well-respected within their communities. Go ask your doctor!

### **Why incorporate healthcare providers into your smokefree campaign?**

Healthcare providers are great messengers to relay the health benefits of going smokefree and to explain the adverse health effects of secondhand smoke. They are the most credible source for knowledge on how the body functions, and most can effectively translate medical and dental “jargon” into layman’s terms.

### **Why would healthcare providers be interested in working on smokefree indoor air campaigns?**

In addition to the medical ethics they have sworn to uphold, and having a vested interest in protecting and treating the public’s health, there are a number of reasons why healthcare professionals would want to work on a smokefree air campaign:

- **Solutions.** Having to treat patients on a daily basis who present symptoms resulting from exposure to secondhand smoke can be quite frustrating. Smokefree air provides an effective solution to needless disease and death.
- **Giving back to the community.** Many healthcare providers seek opportunities for civic involvement and to give back to their communities.
- **It’s personal.** Healthcare providers may have a family member or close friend who has been adversely affected by secondhand smoke, and thus have a personal interest and emotion vested in the smokefree indoor air issue.
- **Active retirement.** Like other professionals, doctors, dentists, and nurses retire but may want to continue to be involved in public health matters.
- **Diversity.** Smokefree advocacy allows healthcare providers to get out of their offices and hospitals. Being involved in a campaign also offers travel and a chance to use skills they don’t normally get to practice.
- **Positive Exposure.** Involvement in a campaign is a form of positive exposure for healthcare professionals. Increased visibility among the public leads to greater name recognition for individual caregivers, as well as the entire healthcare profession. It shows that the health community is actively involved and supportive of smokefree air.

## How to approach healthcare professionals about smokefree involvement

Healthcare providers are very busy individuals. Many juggle 12- to 16-hour work shifts, a multitude of caseloads, and students and researchers, often more than five days a week. This schedule leaves very little time for rest and relaxation, let alone advocating for smokefree indoor air. As when introducing the issue of secondhand smoke exposure to your community, you must think creatively and strategically. Most importantly, do not assume that healthcare professionals will not be interested; you never know unless you ask.

### *Practical Approaches*

- **Start with your own healthcare provider.** Personal relationships are always helpful. At your next physical or dental appointment, mention your interest in smokefree communities, gauge your caregiver's interest, ask questions, and leave a brochure with the coalition's contact information on it, so that if your healthcare provider wants to follow-up, he or she knows where to call.
- **Do your homework.** Are there any doctors in your community who have done research on the health effects of secondhand smoke, smoking, or smoking cessation?
- **Go where they are:** local hospital and dental clinics, hospital sponsored events, state offices of public health, social events, benefits, fundraising activities, unions, retired doctors, dentists, and nurses' organizations, and associations. Many past presidents of medical, dental, and nursing associations are very political individuals and veterans of the political arena.
- **Go through their families.** Similar to approaching your own physician or dentist, or your own nurse practitioner or dental hygienist about secondhand smoke, start with those individuals you have a pre-established, personal relationship with. If you are friends with a doctor's husband who is passionate about worker health and safety or your sister-in-law is a member of a nurses' union, talk with them first. If a family member is interested and passionate about secondhand smoke, that interest frequently rubs off on those closest to them.

### *Creative Approaches*

- **Peer to peer recruitment.** Once doctors are involved, encourage them to reach out to their colleagues. Founded in 1977 by Dr. Alan Blum, Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) is a national organization of medical students and physicians dedicated to preventing disease and promoting good health; to persuading more medical professionals to speak out against the marketing tactics of the tobacco and alcohol industries; and to breaking the links and associations that advertisers, the media, music, and other social entities have created between unhealthy habits and glamorous, popular images. In Montana, physicians formed a special group to provide a unified voice on tobacco prevention issues. This group, called Physicians for Prevention collected smokefree endorsements of support from fellow doctors. The list of more than 150 doctors is used to demonstrate the urgency of this health issue to Montana's policymakers. In Colorado, a group called Smokefree Doctors mobilizes medical providers to write letters, testify at city council and state legislative hearings, and talk to the media about the health dangers of secondhand smoke exposure. Their website is [www.smokefreedocs.com](http://www.smokefreedocs.com). An all-

volunteer nurse activist and educational group called the Nightingale Nurses seeks to highlight tobacco industry marketing, researching, and smokefree policy-making interference behaviors to the public. Their website is [www.nightingalenurses.org](http://www.nightingalenurses.org). Encourage your champion healthcare professional to recruit their colleagues to join the cause.

- **Place a newspaper ad.** Snap happy? Have a coalition volunteer take a formal photo of supportive healthcare providers. Include the photo with their joint statement of support for smokefree air in a local newspaper ad. This worked well in Pueblo, CO, where doctors funded the ad placement. They were then seen as the face of the campaign, which reminded people that *this is about health*. These doctors continued to give their time, energy, and financial support to the campaign.
- **Set up displays in healthcare facilities.** Call the office managers of healthcare offices in your community to find out if and when you can post information on secondhand smoke. Think of these areas as recruiting grounds for smokefree supporters. Perhaps, ask to place a drop box for collecting names. Be sure to include a table tent or small sign informing that those individuals who provide their contact information will receive a copy of the local smokefree dining guide and/or updates on smokefree events being held within the community.
- **Medical schools.** Many medical schools, such as the University of California, San Francisco and the University of Wisconsin, have tobacco research centers that employ medical students. Take advantage of preexisting networks and infrastructures that are already in place. Create a doctor-tracking program of medical students who research tobacco. Already knowledgeable on the topic, these budding doctors are great future advocates after medical school and during their residency and practice.
- **Continuing education.** Hold a doctor, dentist, and/or nurse's forum and/or office clinic on secondhand smoke. Speak with the office manager to find out when weekly staff meetings are held. Try to schedule five minutes of the meeting to discuss secondhand smoke, disseminate information, and list ways one can get involved.
- **Host a breakfast and/or dinner.** Have materials on secondhand smoke on a table to disseminate. Have local doctors, dentists, nurses, and dental hygienists petition their respective state societies to write a formal resolution endorsing smokefree indoor air. Call ANR for sample resolution language at (510) 841-3032.

### **When to approach healthcare professionals**

As noted earlier, healthcare professionals are very busy individuals. The best time to approach them is during office hours or in the mornings. The earlier you approach them, the better, such as seven o'clock in the morning. Consider approaching staff members, as they are the eyes and ears of the office and they tend to know the most optimal times to reach the doctors, dentists, and nurses.

Do not dismiss emergency room doctors. They tend to work long shifts, but then have several days off in a row.

## **National Medical and Dental Associations to contact**

Contact information for some of the most prominent medical and dentistry associations is listed below. You can locate the chapter closest to your community by contacting its national headquarters via phone or website. Also, to see how diverse the healthcare community is, visit [www.pslgroup.com/dg/medassoc.htm](http://www.pslgroup.com/dg/medassoc.htm), for a list of hundreds of healthcare organizations and associations.

American Medical Association, (800) 621-8335 or [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

American Dental Association, (312) 440-2500 or [www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)

American Nursing Association, 800-274-4262 or (202) 651-7000 or [www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org)

American Dental Hygienists' Association, (312) 440-8900 or [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org)

# Creating a Healthcare Professional Champion:

## Levels of Involvement & Roles to Play

Champions are very infrequently born overnight and not every healthcare professional will be a champion. Becoming a smokefree advocate and champion takes time, dedication, and hard work. It requires a strong knowledge of the science of secondhand smoke, one's community, and how to frame the issue to the public, media, and policymakers. Start your healthcare professionals out slowly by engaging them at coalition meetings and encouraging them to write editorials in the local newspaper. Simply by participating and being present, they will gain knowledge of the issue, your mission, and their potential roles within the campaign, little by little. You'll find that there is something for everyone. Some healthcare providers may be amazing writers, while others may have persuasive and dynamic oratory skills.

Where does your healthcare professional currently stand on the "Champion Triangle"?

