

Smoking habits among medical students in Western Saudi Arabia

To the Editor

I read with interest the article by Wali on smoking habits (SH) among medical students in Western Saudi Arabia.¹ Smoking habits among medical students, and hence, future physicians yields deep concern as smoking physicians could adversely impact interactions with patients on smoking, and they are less likely to initiate cessation interventions.² Various anecdotal studies have shown that SH is generally prevailing among Saudi medical students. It is worthy to mention that over the past few years there was nearly a 3-fold increase in the prevalence SH among Saudi female medical students from 2.4% in 2006³ to 9.1% in 2009-2010.¹ It is expected that the prevalence is on the rise in the forthcoming future. Although SH among elderly woman is socially accepted in many Arabian conservative communities, it is still socially disapproved among young women. Increased social acceptance of women's smoking is a part of general liberalization of norms concerning women's behavior, reflecting increasing equality between genders.⁴ Factors significantly contributing to increase motives towards smoking among women, including medical students, have been recently elucidated. They were found to involve curiosity, decreases boredom, tension, and helps one to relax. Also, women had the misconception that smoking helps to reduce weight.^{5,6} I do agree with Wali¹ that education and anti-smoking campaigns are the key toward successfully containing the foreseeable burden of SH. However, special emphasis is needed to be focused on women not because of the close association of smoking with certain health hazards among them, but also because women could play as influential role models within families to strongly discourage family members, including children and adolescents from smoking.

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Reply from the Author

I am very happy to see the manuscript "Smoking habits among medical students in Western Saudi Arabia" to be of interest to many eminent colleagues, and I would like to thank Prof. Al-Mandalawi for his invaluable comments on the article. I cannot agree less with Prof. Al-Mandalawi's grave concern regarding the rapidly increasing prevalence of SH among females over the last decade. I believe it is very crucial to give this group special attention, considering their important role in the family upbringing. Therefore, special emphasis should be made on educating these role models on the dangers of smoking at a personal and family level. National antismoking campaign should take place without any delay, to save the community from the devastating effects of smoking. In particular there should be nationwide restriction of smoking in all public places and transport, which would help in stigmatizing smoking habit in our society.

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