

## **Smoking cessation saves lives, money**

We would like to commend the Florida Legislature and Gov. Charlie Crist for their efforts to pass legislation to increase the cigarette user fee by \$1 per pack.

Previously, Florida ranked 46th in the nation for cigarette excise taxes and effective July 1, we will rank 22nd. That, coupled with the 62-cent increase in the federal tax, will drive more and more people to quit smoking and will provide the greatest disincentive for children to take up smoking.

A study done by the Washington Economics Group indicates that smoking costs Florida more than \$20 billion per year. That cost is equivalent to \$6,942 per smoker. About half of this costly burden falls on government, private employers and non-smokers through increased medical expenditures and reduced workplace productivity.

With the increase in the cost of cigarettes and other tobacco products, we will see an increase in people wanting to quit. We should make every effort to make sure services are available to help them break their nicotine addiction. To provide smokers with the greatest chance of success, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that smoking cessation coverage include:

At least four counseling sessions of at least 30 minutes each,

All FDA-approved prescription and over-the-counter nicotine replacement treatments, and

Counseling and medication for at least two cessation attempts per year - with low or no co-pays or deductibles for counseling and medications.

Every dollar spent on smoking cessation programs will yield \$1.90 to \$5.75 in economic gains for Florida, according to the economic study. When a smoker quits successfully, 25 percent of the total financial benefits go to his or her employer in increased productivity and reduced absenteeism. By following the CDC guidelines, Florida could save as much as \$394.7 million in costs associated with smoking.

Smoking affects not only Floridians' wallets, but also their lives. Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States and contributes to more than 440,000 deaths each year. We encourage all health plans, the state of Florida employee health program and Medicaid to cover proven smoking cessation programs, and by doing so, we will save Floridians money and lives.

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