

Health insurance should help people quit smoking  
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Help smokers to quit the habit

As a **family physician** I help patients with ailments ranging from minor sniffles to terminal diseases, and I am frequently saddened by the deadly, disabling and highly preventable effects of smoking and other tobacco use.

I have seen firsthand that nicotine addiction is powerful, and overcoming that obstacle is much more difficult than just deciding to quit smoking. Only 5 to 7 percent of people succeed quitting smoking 'cold turkey.' More often tobacco users need an arsenal of resources and support behind them to help overcome their addiction.

I hope that the passage of a federal tax increase on cigarettes and Florida's \$1 tobacco surcharge will offer a financial incentive for people to take control of their addiction and try to stop smoking. However, we need to be prepared to offer resources to those who are motivated to beat their addiction to nicotine.

I fear that if a patient's health plan doesn't cover treatments for smoking cessation, patients will not seek the care they need to address their addiction. It is time for our state government and our business community to step forward and call for coverage for smoking cessation as a standard benefit in all health care coverage, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This treatment includes:

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

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

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

According to a study by the Washington Economics Group, every dollar spent on smoking cessation programs will yield \$1.90 to \$5.75 in economic gains for Florida. When a smoker does quit smoking successfully, a full 25 percent of the total financial benefits go to his or her employer in the form of increased productivity and reduced absenteeism.

Prevention is key to stopping people from ever picking up a cigarette, but as a physician treating patients already addicted to nicotine, appropriate and affordable coverage will be needed.

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