Successful New Year's resolutions part two: Quitters do win

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As resolutions go, quitting an addiction to nicotine certainly ranks among the most challenging; however, it is probably one of the best things a person can do to improve his or her health and quality of life in 2009 and beyond.

Currently the number one cause of preventable illness in the United States, tobacco is extremely habit-forming and dangerous no matter whether it is inhaled, chewed or absorbed from the person next to you. It's generally easy to obtain, socially acceptable to use and sometimes even offers a moment of peace away from work, kids and other stressors.

And, as all those smokers and ex-smokers know, it is one of the most difficult substances to stop abusing. That, however, is only a fact. It is not an excuse.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Heart, Lung and Blood Institute suggest that cigarette smoking kills nearly half a million people per year and causes disease-related complications in more than eight million. Ninety-six billion dollars are spent annually in health care costs and another $97 billion are funneled away in lost revenue. If these figures were added to the cost of cigarettes, they would cost more than $40 per pack.

Of course the impact of tobacco use is not just financial, there are countless, life-threatening health risks. Smoking increases the incidence of heart disease, lung disease and almost all types of cancer including breast, lung, colon, bladder and bone. Pregnant women who smoke subject their unborn children to underdeveloped placentas with poor oxygenation, leading to low birth weight, underdeveloped lungs and preterm delivery. Smoking during pregnancy also leads to increased rates of respiratory illnesses, asthma, ear infections and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in babies.

Perhaps even more discerning for the future is that 25 percent of all high school age young adults and eight percent of middle school students smoke. This means that approximately one in seven children smokes.

It doesn't particularly matter what kind of tobacco product is used. Hookah or cigar smoking can be potentially even more dangerous than cigarettes because of the deeper inhalations often used with these methods. "Light" or "filtered" cigarettes do nothing to put another layer between one's lungs and the carbon monoxide, cyanide and other poisonous gases released with each puff. No matter its form, tobacco is unsafe and potentially deadly.

Sadly, there are approximately 45 million people a year who smoke. But, there are another 45 million who are former smokers, and nearly 70 percent of people who smoke want to quit. Clearly, quitting is possible.

Those who make the decision to quit smoking don't have to wait to reap the rewards. Within a few days to months, gum health, sense of taste and smell and irritating coughing improves. If ex-smokers remain smoke-free, within a few years they will see their risks of cardiovascular disease plummet, possibly reaching that of a nonsmoker's within 10 years.

Barriers do exist. Fears of weight gain, continued spousal tobacco use and having no other mechanism to control stress combined with long work days, deployments and the demands of children all lead to relapse or resistance to quitting in the first place. But there are a host of products out there designed to make the quitting process easier and more successful.

Nicotine replacement products are useful. Gum, lozenges, patches and sprays all can curb the craving without the terrible side effects of the other ingredients in cigarettes. Non-nicotine products offer another avenue for success. Zyban helps block the reinforcement that occurs when someone takes a drag off of a nicotine product. Chantix is a nicotine receptor blocker. It directly prevents nicotine from binding to its receptors in the brain, clearly averting the positive connection associated with smoking.

Of course, doctors are tremendous sources of support for quitters. To encourage patients to quit smoking, physicians and other health care providers will usually ask them about smoking at every visit. There is overwhelming evidence that any time anyone asks if a smoker wants to quit, his or her chances of quitting improve. Doctors use the five "A's" to help patients make strides toward quitting:

• Ask about use.

• Advise quitting. Even 30 seconds spent on advising someone to stop tobacco products increases their chances of quitting successfully.

• Assess one's willingness to quit and the barriers in their way.

• Assist with nicotine replacement therapy, counseling or non-nicotine therapies.

• Arrange follow up. All tobacco users need family, friend and societal support in their efforts.

USNH Yokosuka providers have the ability to assess and treat tobacco dependence. Anyone who would like to learn more about the products available to help smokers kick the habit are encouraged to make an appointment with their family care provider.

To all smokers, please use 2009 as a benchmark year to be a quitter because, in this case, quitters do win.

TRICARE provides emergency care for service members, families traveling overseas

By MC3 Bryan Reckard, Navy Public Affairs Support Element West, Det., Japan

With the help of International SOS (ISOS), TRICARE has made it possible for service members and their families traveling to receive medical care in overseas locations.

TRICARE, the health care program serving active duty service members and their families, teamed up with ISOS, a worldwide medical assistance company, under the TRICARE Global Remote Overseas (TGRO) program to provide active duty service members and their families with medical care in remote overseas locations.

Although active duty service members already receive the services of ISOS when they require urgent and emergency medical services while traveling overseas, access to these services is now available to active duty family members enrolled in TRICARE Prime.

Lora Sanders-Vannoy, a TRICARE Pacific marketing representative said the expanded service availability is far-reaching.

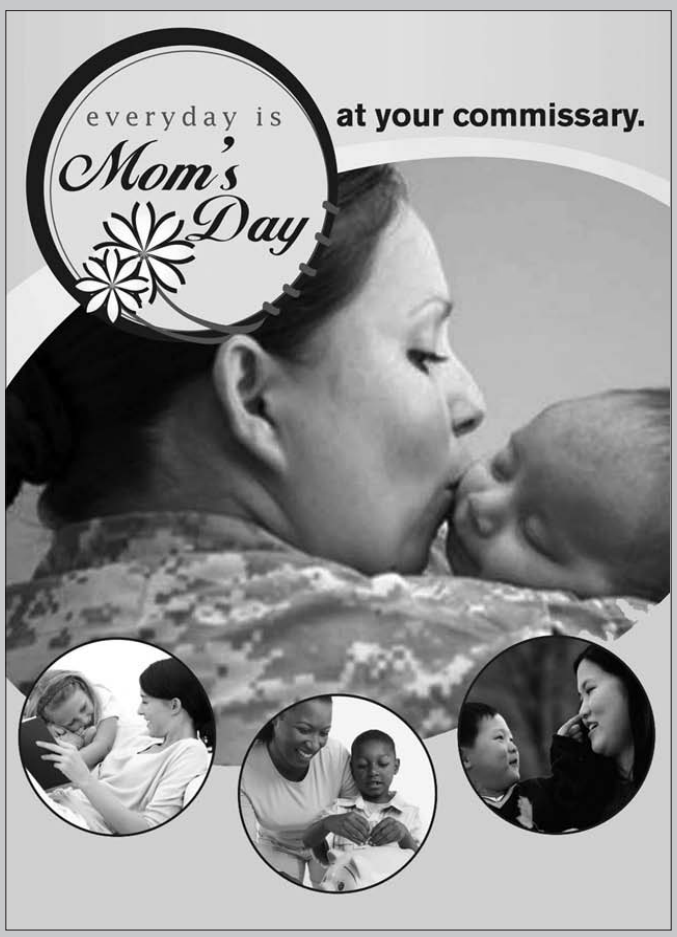
"TRICARE Global Remote Overseas was put into place to provide medical assistance to our service members that were stationed in remote locations in the Pacific such as Fiji, Diego Garcia and places like that," Sanders-Vannoy said. "Now it has expanded into all areas of the Pacific, whether they are remote locations or not."

ISOS is the company TRICARE collaborated with to offer the TGRO program to both active duty members and their families traveling overseas.

"After that program was put into effect, a need was identified to expand the program through ISOS," said Sanders-Vannoy. "Basically what ISOS does for us, is coordinate a network of providers and facilities throughout the Pacific, and those facilities and providers have agreed to be utilized by ISOS. ISOS will handle the payments and handle the claims filing for the beneficiary, so there isn't any paperwork or money exchange on the beneficiary's end."

Sanders-Vannoy said the TGRO program only applies to emergency medical situations that threaten life, limb or eyesight. When in doubt, beneficiaries should seek help immediately.

Sanders-Vannoy recommends visiting your local TRICARE Service Center and picking up a TRICARE Pacific Travel Card to find out more information on TRGO and ISOS.



DeCA celebrates every day as "Mom's Day"

By Kevin L. Robinson, DeCA Public Affairs

Every day in commissaries around the world, mothers are shopping for their families. They often pay attention to everyone but themselves. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) would like to lavish some well-deserved attention on the military mom for a change.

"Moms are the heartbeat of our military families, whether they are holding down the home front or in uniform themselves deployed down range," said Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., DeCA director and chief executive officer. "From January through Mother's Day in May, we want to focus special attention on our military moms and show them how much they mean to us."

With its "Every Day is Mom's Day at Your Commissary" initiative, DeCA wants to pamper mom with a variety of specially priced health and beauty care products set aside just for them. It's the commissary's way of saying "thank-you" to a customer demographic that represents 80 percent of our shoppers.

Beginning in early January, commissaries stateside and overseas rolled out their "red carpets" for mothers who populate all segments of the military community. Each store will highlight a special shopping area for military moms, a place where mothers can purchase discounted products to treat themselves or where their husbands and children also can do the honors.

"The military mom is the person who typically runs the household and routinely puts herself at the end of a long list of family obligations," Sakowitz said. "Every Day is Mom's Day seeks to put our military moms first, honoring all the sacrifices they make every day."

Commissary customers can expect to see banners, posters and shelf signs that point the way toward product displays designed especially for mom. They also will see product giveaways and demonstrations as well as an emphasis on women's health articles posted on the DeCA Web site, http://www.commissaries.com, in the Ask the Dietitian forum.