



Prim Care Clin Office Pract
29 (2002) 629–648

PRIMARY
CARE

Tobacco smoking as a chronic disease: notes on prevention and treatment

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Smoking is the leading preventable cause of illness and death in our society. Tobacco use is responsible for approximately 3 million deaths worldwide [1] with over 430,000 in the United States alone [2]. To put these figures in perspective, more lives are lost to tobacco than those caused by alcohol, recreational drugs, fires, automobile accidents, suicides, homicides and AIDS combined. Currently, more than one in five adult deaths in the United States is attributable to tobacco [2]. It has been projected that one in three adult deaths will be attributable to tobacco use worldwide by 2020 [3]. Despite the known health hazards of tobacco use, smoking remains highly prevalent, with an estimated 46.5 million adults, or nearly 24% of US adults over 18, currently smoking cigarettes [4]. The economic burden of tobacco related health care is enormous. An estimated \$50 to \$73 billion are spent on direct excess medical costs attributable to smoking annually, with an additional estimated \$50 billion in indirect attributable costs [5,6]. However, these figures may grossly underestimate the total cost to the society, since they do not include loss of lives and property from smoking related fires, perinatal care for low birth weight infants of mothers who smoke, or medical care costs associated with diseases caused by second hand smoke.

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