

STAGE: Former Tobacco User

You are a pharmacist at an anticoagulation clinic and are counseling one of your patients, Mrs. Friesen, who is a 60-year-old woman with a history of recurrent right leg deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in right leg). She has been taking warfarin for the past 5 years. About 1 year ago she was hospitalized for shortness of breath and high blood pressure. At that time she was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Prior to the hospitalization she had been a pack-a-day smoker of cigarettes for about 30 years. Her physician and you urged her to quit to reduce her risk of blood clots and stroke. She used the nicotine patch to help her quit and has been free from tobacco for 1 year now.

KEY POINTS



THIS PATIENT

- is a former tobacco user, having quit smoking 1 year ago
- had a recent slip (smoked three cigarettes 2 weeks ago)
- has a complex medical history, with several conditions that are exacerbated by smoking



THE PHARMACIST

- assesses the patient's stage of change
- discusses the concept of a slip
- addresses the patient's psychosocial reasons for staying tobacco-free
- discusses stress management techniques

CASE
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INSTRUCTOR GUIDELINES

Step 1: ASK

Not applicable. The pharmacist knows the patient is a former tobacco user.

Step 2: ADVISE

Not applicable. The patient has already quit.

Step 3: ASSESS

Pharmacist

Mrs. Friesen, how are you doing today? I know it's been close to a year since you quit smoking cigarettes. How are you doing being smoke-free?

Patient

Well, I'm ashamed to admit it, but I smoked again 2 weeks ago.

This patient is a former smoker who has slipped and may have relapsed and fallen back into an earlier stage. Further questions are warranted to determine this patient's readiness to quit (or stay quit).

Pharmacist

Please tell me what happened.

Patient

I had a fight with my husband over our household finances. I was so angry and stressed. The urge to smoke was so unbearable that I went out and bought a pack of cigarettes. In a sick way I also wanted to get back at my husband since I know he hated my smoking. I feel terrible about the whole thing. I only intended to smoke one cigarette, but I chain-smoked three cigarettes in row. I feel like a total failure. All my hard work this past year to kick the habit...down the drain!

Step 3: ASSESS (cont'd)

Pharmacist

Mrs. Friesen, you are not a failure. And all your efforts to become a nonsmoker are not "down the drain." You say this fight happened two weeks ago. Have you had any cigarettes or have you been tempted to smoke again since then?

Patient

No, not a one, but I must admit that I didn't realize how much I missed smoking until I had those few cigarettes. It completely relaxed me, and I was able to deal with my problems.

This patient remains in the *maintenance* stage but has had a recent slip. She is at risk for relapse and needs further assistance to remain smoke-free.

Step 4: ASSIST

 Assess tobacco use history

Not applicable. This was done at a previous assessment.

 Discuss key issues: *reasons/motivation for wanting to stay quit*

Pharmacist

Mrs. Friesen, please don't be so hard on yourself. Quitting smoking is a process, one that in many cases takes years to accomplish. What you've experienced is something we call a slip, but this is behind you now. We need to "let a slip slide." Let's learn from this experience and make sure it doesn't happen again. Please tell me about your motivations to stay tobacco-free?

Patient

I don't want any more blood clots and I dread the thought of having a stroke. I've also noticed I seem to have more energy and I don't get so winded when I'm out walking my dog.

 Discuss key issues: *confidence in ability to stay quit*

Pharmacist

How confident are you that you can avoid smoking?

Step 4: ASSIST (cont'd)

Patient

I don't know. It depends on when you ask me. Right now I feel OK, if I try to think of it as just a slip instead of a complete failure. I must say I'm worried, though. It would have been so easy to fall back into my old patterns.

Pharmacist

Remember that smoking is just a memory now. When you think about smoking, picture yourself instead as a happy, productive, energetic nonsmoker. Just because you think about something doesn't mean you have to do it.

 Discuss key issues: *social support for quitting*

Pharmacist

How does your family feel about your having quit? What about friends?

Patient

My husband is a nonsmoker. He's proud of the effort I've made to quit smoking. My daughter's also happy. She's wanted me to quit for years. My friends are also very supportive. A couple of them used to smoke, so they know how difficult it is to quit the habit. I haven't told anyone about my slip. I don't want to disappoint them...or embarrass myself.

 Discuss key issues: *concerns about weight gain*

Pharmacist

Have you gained any weight as a result of quitting? Does this concern you?

Patient

I've gained 10 pounds since I quit. I can't wear some of my old clothes, and I really want to lose about 20 pounds. Both you and my doctor say losing weight will also help with my high blood pressure. I'm going on a 2-week cruise to the Bahamas next month, and my goal is to deal with my weight gain when I return.

Step 4: ASSIST (cont'd)

 Facilitate quitting process: *discuss coping strategies*

Pharmacist

Let's talk about some coping mechanisms to help you handle stressful situations in the future. Remember, cigarettes do *not* cure stress. It's easy to believe that cigarettes help you cope because you probably smoked on many occasions in the past when you were stressed. It's important for you to know that *you* have been responsible for dealing with stressful situations—not the cigarettes. Let's talk about alternative ways to handle stress. What other techniques have you used in the past (besides smoking) that you find calming and relaxing?

Patient

This may sound strange, but I like to pull weeds in my flower garden. I also like to relax on the sofa and listen to my classical music tapes.

Pharmacist

That's great. You may also practice deep breathing throughout the day. You may find this also helps to relax you during a stressful situation. Continue to remind yourself that smoking does not solve your problems.

 Facilitate quitting process: *offer to assist throughout the quit attempt*

Pharmacist

You have come a long way in the past year. You should be proud of yourself for being able to handle the temptation to return to smoking full time after your slip.

As you know, quitting using tobacco or cigarette smoking is a process, and often it takes people years until they are completely free from tobacco addiction. It's important for you to continue to think about the types of situations where you might be tempted to use tobacco, such as when you are stressed or angry, and to be certain that you know how to cope with your temptation. If you can, just walk away from the situation and remind yourself how you have greatly improved your health and how good you and your family feel about your quitting. Use the strategies we discussed (listening to music, weeding, and deep breathing) and continue to remind yourself that you no longer are a smoker!

Step 5: ARRANGE

Pharmacist

Mrs. Friesen, it seems as though the likelihood of you returning to smoking is small, but if for any reasons your temptations get stronger or if you slip again and smoke, even a puff, I'd like you to call me as soon as possible so we can talk. Keep up the good work. You're doing great! I'll talk to you in another 4 weeks when we check your blood again.

This interaction is meant to be a small component of the clinic visit. The entire intervention should last fewer than 5 minutes. The goal is for students to appreciate that tobacco cessation interventions should be considered part of routine health maintenance. Students should also learn that tobacco use status should be assessed at each clinic appointment. Relapse prevention interventions are especially important with former smokers who have recently quit.