Tobacco dependence is the country’s leading preventable cause of death and yet there is increasing evidence that health care professionals are inadequately educated on methods for assisting patients with quitting. Ferry and colleagues reported 70% of medical schools were only briefly covering tobacco related topics, and Heath and colleagues reported fewer than 3 hours of tobacco-related topics in 84% of acute care nurse practitioner (ACNP) programs in the United States. In addition, 60% of those ACNP programs did not make use of the U.S. Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guideline for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence.

The absence of comprehensive tobacco prevention and cessation training in nursing education can result in lost opportunities for promoting cessation with the 48 million adults and 3-4 million children who smoke tobacco products in the United States. Aggressive curriculum changes are needed for all health professions. An expert panel convened by the National Cancer Institute recommended that by 1995, effective smoking cessation and prevention interventions become a mandatory component of undergraduate medical education in all U.S. schools of medicine. Even though it currently is not mandatory, nursing educators must seek opportunities to design and implement curricula that address tobacco control practices.

In response to the lack of education about tobacco cessation, nursing faculty from Georgetown University collaborated with pharmacy faculty from the University of California San Francisco to implement the Rx for Change: Clinician-Assisted Tobacco Cessation Curriculum at a “Summer Institute for Tobacco Control Practices in Nursing Education” in Washington DC. The specific goal of the Summer Institute is to increase tobacco prevention and tobacco cessation education in acute care nurse practitioner (ACNP) curricula. The objectives for the Summer Institute are as follows:

Objective #1: Provide an intensive and interactive learning experience for ACNP faculty that will facilitate an increase in tobacco control practices (number of hours taught in ACNP curriculum).

Objective #2: Provide ACNP faculty with the necessary “tools and skills” through a train-the-trainer educational methodology (based on the Clinical Practice Guideline for Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence) that will facilitate an increase in the confidence level for teaching tobacco prevention and tobacco cessation.

Objective #3: Provide the ACNP faculty participants with the Rx for Change: Clinician-Assisted Tobacco Cessation Curriculum course manual/materials that will facilitate implementation and/or dissemination of tobacco control practices for other nursing curriculum besides ACNP curriculum.

Integrating tobacco curriculum in acute care nurse practitioner education will prepare students how to meet the national Healthy People 2010 goals for tobacco control. In addition, the Summer Institute will serve as a pilot model for a nationwide dissemination of the Rx for Change: Clinician-Assisted Tobacco Cessation Curriculum in schools of nursing throughout the United States.

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