

Smokers ignorant of cancer cause

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FEWER Victorians die of lung cancer but most smokers do not know cigarettes cause it, research shows.

Cancer Council figures show that lung cancer deaths dropped from 1805 in 2003 to 1777 in 2004.

But when smokers were asked to name the diseases caused by smoking, six out of 10 did not mention lung cancer, despite it being responsible for 80% of cases.

While cancer experts were heartened by a levelling off in the deaths of women of lung cancer after decades of increases, they were dismayed by a 25% drop in the number of smokers identifying smoking as a cause of lung cancer.

The number of diagnoses jumped from 2041 in 2003 to 2309 in 2004. It remains the biggest killer of all cancers in Victoria, claiming 34 lives every week. Just 11% of sufferers survive beyond five years.

The alarming research has prompted Quit Victoria to remake one of its most memorable anti-smoking adverts.

The hard-hitting television campaign shows tar being wrung out of a sponge to symbolise the amount of cancer-causing tar going into a smoker's lungs every year.

"The original sponge advertisement was a real turning point on tobacco control, it was the first time smokers were shown the effects smoking had on their health in a graphic and uncompromising way," said Quit executive director Fiona Sharkie.

"People tend to assume that every smoker knows the habit is a direct cause of lung cancer but this research paints a very different picture.

"By reinventing the iconic sponge campaign we are delivering the lung cancer message to a whole new generation of smokers."

The relaunch marks the 20th anniversary of Quit, which has helped halve the adult smoking rate from 30% in 1987 to just over 17%.

Relaunching the advertisement yesterday, Premier John Brumby pledged \$5.6 million to Quit's marketing campaigns. He said Victoria's new tobacco-control strategy, led by Health Minister Daniel Andrews, aimed to reduce the smoking rate to 14% by 2013.

Mr Brumby said smoking cost Victoria more than \$5 billion a year.

"If you think of the 350 people a year who are tragically killed on our roads, multiply that by 10 or 11 times each year and that's the number of people whose lives are lost because of cancer, much of it caused by tobacco consumption," he said.

VicHealth chief executive and former Quit boss Todd Harper said the drop in smoking rates showed the importance of investing in preventive health.

"The success we've seen with tobacco gives us optimism that if we get the policies right across physical activity, across nutrition and alcohol, we can see substantial gains which will secure better health outcomes for the next 20 years and beyond," he said.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/11/19/1195321695327.html>