

“Butt Busters”: Kids Against Smoking A Program to Educate Elementary School Students About the Dangers of Tobacco Use

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According to the American Cancer Society (ACS) (2004), lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths. In 2004, an estimated 186,550 people will be diagnosed and 165,130 will die from this malignancy (ACS). Research indicates that more than 90% of lung cancers are related to smoking. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, using data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reported that 4.5 million children younger than 18 are smokers (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2003).

Oncology nurses play an essential role in alerting the public to important issues in cancer. Nurses can educate children about the dangers of smoking and help to influence the decision to never develop a smoking habit. This article describes a collaborative program developed by the Greater Pittsburgh (PA) Chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society (GPC-ONS) and Cancer Care Inc. in New York, NY. The primary goal of the project was to increase children's awareness of the dangers of tobacco during Lung Cancer Awareness Week in November 2001.

Background

In September 2001, ONS approached GPC-ONS to participate in a project sponsored by Cancer Care Inc. At the first meeting, ONS staff and interested members of the GPC-ONS board gathered to discuss potential interest in developing a program for Lung Cancer Awareness Week. GPC-ONS was chosen to receive a \$4,500 grant to develop a program, dinner, public awareness campaign, or other community-based event to increase awareness of lung cancer and tobacco use.

The planning group consisted of seven members from the GPC-ONS board, whose work experience ranged from office or hospital clinic nurses, radiation therapy nurses, and a research-based nurse to a clinical nurse specialist for a biotechnology company. Their

educational backgrounds were just as varied, including diploma, bachelor's, and master's level preparation. At the first meeting, the planning group considered several proposals, including a one-time educational program using news personalities in the Pittsburgh area, advertisements and interviews with lung cancer survivors in the local newspaper's health section, an educational report on a local news station, and an outreach program.

The second meeting centered on determining which of the proposed programs would reach the greatest audience and have the most impact. To determine this, the group used the following criteria: volunteer availability, cost, and the ability to replicate the program. After much discussion, the group decided to target children in grades four through six, the age at which peer pressure begins to be most evident and preadolescent experimentation begins. Children of these ages still are likely to be receptive to adult influence on their behaviors. The group believed that a creative activity would be most engaging to this cohort of children and considered a poster or essay contest about the hazards of using tobacco and smoking. If possible, the program ideally would be a part of their health education class. The name “Butt Busters”: Kids Against Smoking was selected.

To move the project forward, each committee member was assigned a specific task and deadline. Grade-school principals in the surrounding area were contacted and invited to participate. Requests for tobacco-related information were forwarded to the ACS. Letters were drafted to introduce ONS and the GPC-ONS project to the students and their parents and guardians. Pre- and post-testing was planned to assess the participants' knowledge before and after the program. Because children in these grades typically enjoy graphic representations of reality, the planning group looked for items to bring to the program that would have visual impact

and engage learners. To encourage interaction among the students and presenters, the committee borrowed “What's in the Box” from ACS. The kit is a demonstration box full of poisons that actually are found in cigarettes. The University of Pittsburgh Gross Pathology Department lent a specimen of a diseased lung with a tumor for the students to review. Committee members made up samples of phlegm for examination by the students. In an essay or poster contest, winners would receive trophies for first, second, and third place and honorable mention. Each child who participated would receive a T-shirt. To thank the students and teachers, the group provided funding for a pizza party to

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