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Title: Patient perception of effectiveness of health information on tobacco products and awareness of red flag symptoms for head and neck cancer

Body: Background: This study assessed patient's perception of effectiveness of health warnings on tobacco products. Knowledge of red flag symptoms for head and neck (H+N) cancer was also assessed. The aim was to learn if patients would seek medical attention earlier with an increased awareness of red flag symptoms. All tobacco products must carry combined health warnings consisting of a picture, a text warning and information on stop smoking services. There is no information on tobacco products about seeking medical advice or red flag symptoms.

Methods: A prospective questionnaire case-control study was carried out on patients attending a H+N oncology clinics over three months. Patient opinions toward warning signs on cigarette packages were collected, along with knowledge of red flag symptoms for H+N cancer.

Results: Final analysis included 255 patients.

Most (66.7%) were aware of health warnings for H+N cancer on cigarette packages, 51.0% felt they were effective. Cigarette packages do not include recommendations to seek medical advice for red flag symptoms and 93.3% of our cohort believed they should. Knowledge of any red flag symptom for H+N cancer was present in 63.1% of patients.

Conclusion:

Those with a history of H+N cancer were overall more aware of red flag symptoms but there is still a lack of awareness. There were no difference in awareness between smokers and non smokers. All patients agree there should be more information out there.

Authors: Lennon P 1, Hintze JM 1, Griffith P 1.

Affiliations: 1. St. James Hospital, Department of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery.