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Experts introduce tech-based solution to beat tobacco addiction

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The â??Tobacco Minusâ?? is a one-of-its-kind program will guide patients to quit tobacco with the help of a Smartphone app



While tobacco use has fallen significantly in countries like the United States over the last decades, tobacco dependency persists in India at alarming levels. According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (2016-17), nearly 30% of all Indian adults use tobacco - Cigarettes, beedis, and pipe tobacco, along with smokeless tobacco like snuff, snus, and dissolvable tobacco products are widely prevalent. This addiction persists despite a majority of Indians' being fully aware that tobacco use is harmful. Half of all smoking and smokeless tobacco users are planning to quit tobacco - but few are equipped with the tools to do so successfully. It's a dire predicament, with the resulting diseases such as lung, oral and esophageal cancers claiming the lives of lakhs of Indians.

To address this challenge, Mumbai-based ACI Cumballa Hill Hospital and Asian Cancer Foundation has joined hands with health tech startup Hopscotch Health to design a structured program called 'Tobacco Minus', for tobacco users for over a period of 6 months. The tailor-made program consists of monitoring via a smartphone app, consultations, and counseling sessions.

Padmashri Awardee Dr. Ramakant Deshpande, Onco Surgeon & Chairman of Asian Cancer Institute, highlighted, "According to the World Health Organization, (WHO), tobacco kills more than 8 million people each year. Over 7 million deaths are a result of direct consumption, whereas 1.2million is the result of passive smoking. It is the need of the hour to help people overcome tobacco addiction via cessation programs. Tobacco dependency invites a plethora of health problems such as lung and oral cancer, tooth and gum diseases, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD, asthma, heart disease, oral infections, bronchitis, and even gastrointestinal issues."

He added, "The 'Tobacco Minus' program will make it easy for doctors and counselors to keep track of the health of the patients. Stopping nicotine usage can cause withdrawal symptoms and that also can be managed through this program."

Varun Deshpande, Director at Hopscotch Health said, "The 'Tobacco Minus' program is a 6-week quit plan, that will guide a tobacco user towards quitting tobacco through in-person consultations with psycho-oncologist and a smartphone app that monitors the user's craving and moods. The app can perform daily check-ins; provide daily inspiration or information on coping strategies, and request information from the user to personalize their experience further. The user can notify the app if they're feeling a craving, in order to receive a mitigation strategy based on established coping strategies."

"The app has been designed using insights from the forefront of behavior change and technology development. It is a testament to the power of technology to help people lead healthy lives, more effortlessly. We're proud to partner with ACI Cumballa Hill Hospital to reduce the burden of tobacco-related deaths, and improve the quality of life of the patients," **concluded Varun**.