

Monday, January 11, 2010

Govt 'quitlines' soon to help you kick the butt

Publication: Mail Today, Edition: Delhi, Journalist: Savita Verma, Page No: 17, Location: Top-Right, Width(cms): 25, Height(cms): 26, Size(sq.cms): 650

Govt 'quitlines' soon to help you kick the butt

Telephone helplines will have experts aiding smokers in quitting the habit

By Savita Verma in New Delhi

NOWADAYS, helplines exist for most things under the sun. So why not one to help smokers kick the butt?

The government seems to be thinking on those lines. They are planning to launch a free telephone 'quitline' for smokers, on a pilot basis, this year.

The move is significant as several studies have indicated that free telephone quitlines can help people stop smoking. India is among the 10 countries that make up two-thirds of the world's smokers.

A 'quitline' is a dedicated telephone line which helps people who want to stop smoking by counselling them or guiding them towards therapy, if needed. Many countries print the 'quitline' number on cigarette packets.

Experts said there was a need for quitlines as quitting smoking wasn't easy.

"Many people try to quit but are unable to do so can avail the services of quitlines," EC Gupta, from the Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, said.

Experts trained in helping such people would find out specific barriers which prevent a person from quitting. The experts may enlist the smoker's family and friends to address these barriers.

Some people also go back to smoking because of certain triggers. Counsellors can help smokers deal with these triggers. Some quitlines also have clinics for tobacco cessation.

A new study by Yale scientists released on Friday said giving positive messages to those who want to quit smoking over the

quitlines is more beneficial than scaring them. Thus telling smokers "you will live longer if you quit smoking" was more effective in helping people quit than saying "you will die sooner if you continue smoking."

A Union health ministry official said though there was a helpline to report violations of the anti-smoking law, there was no helpline for smokers.

"There are plans to start a quitline on a pilot basis in Delhi this year," the official said.

The plan would require a lot of

resources as calling a smoking quitline wasn't a one-time process. The caller needed to be followed up. Such a helpline would require psychologists trained in tobacco cessation. These experts will give information on quitting, explain the benefits of quitting, counsel and give information on drugs which help in quitting and how to obtain these.

Each session may last 15-20 minutes and would require the experts to take down the address of the caller and schedule the

next session, the official said.

For a country like India, quitlines will be needed in several languages. The pilot quitline for Delhi will operate in Hindi and English.

Initially, the government had sought help from the American Cancer Society to set up the quitline, but it did not be materialise. Discussions are on with the World Health Organization. The government expects a flood of calls at the beginning. The line will be set up with four to six psychologists working six to eight hours a day.

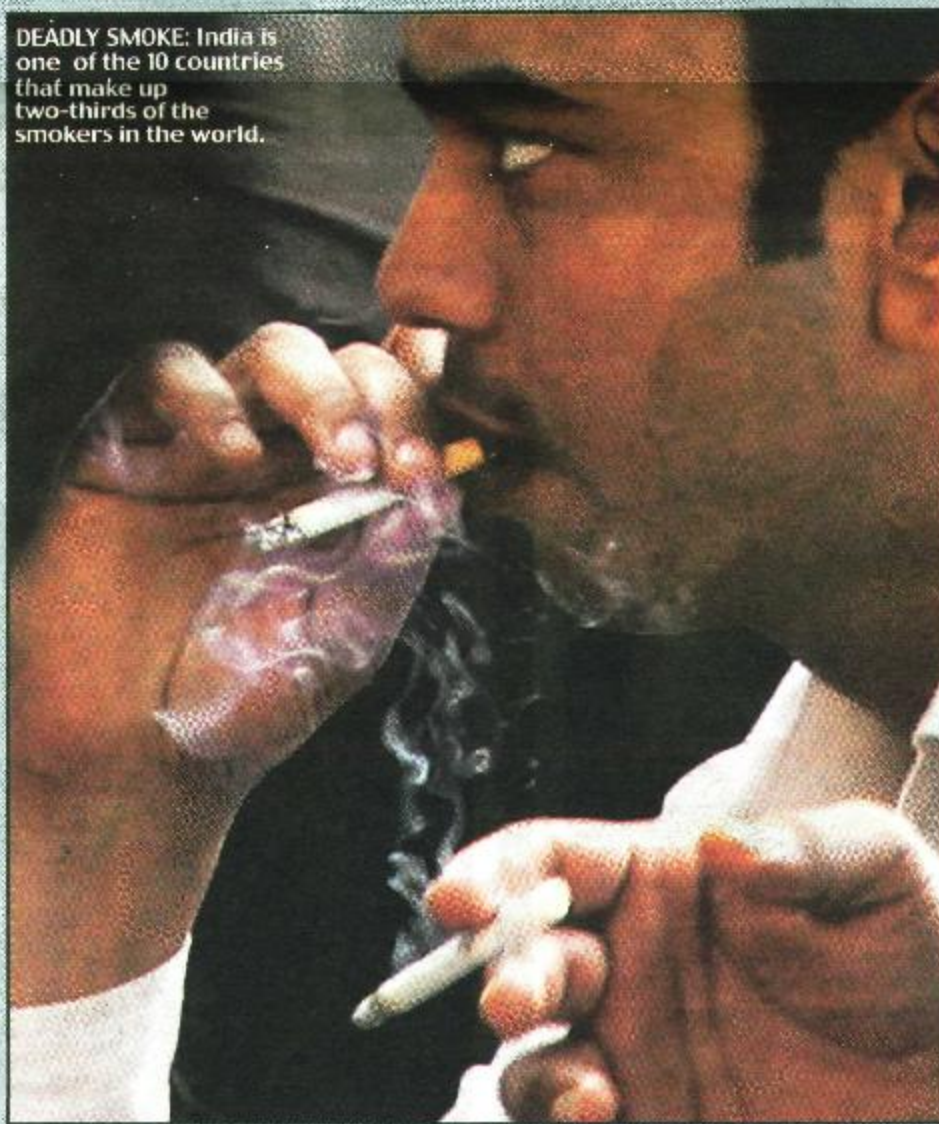
The official said a quitline was necessary as no smoker wanted to visit a healthcare facility to quit smoking, especially if there was no health issue. Also, accessing a healthcare facility is not easy in the country. Besides, people generally start smoking when they are young and face health problems related to the addiction much later in life as tobacco is a slow killer. So they don't visit health facilities until it is too late.

Under the national tobacco control programme, 19 tobacco

cessation centres have been set up all over the country and 42 clinics have been set up at the district level. But these numbers are insignificant in view of the vast population in 640 districts. In India, about a quarter of deaths among middle-aged men are caused by smoking. The third National Family Health Survey indicates high prevalence rate of tobacco usage with 57 per cent men and 10.9 per cent women consuming tobacco in some form.

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DEADLY SMOKE: India is one of the 10 countries that make up two-thirds of the smokers in the world.



20

minutes is the approx time each session will take

19

tobacco cessation centres all over the country

6

is the number of psychologists who will work at the helpline