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Scary pictures can make you stub it

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THEANCHOR

Survey by Healix-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health found that a change in tactic is needed

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Soumita Majumdar. BANGALORE

The government had decided to put a scorpion's image in tobacco packets, in the hope of conveying the message that tobacco consumption can cause the deadly disease, cancer.

While in the medical world, scorpion do symbolise cancer, for the common man it hardly rings an alarm bell with most linking it to the zodiac sign.

A recent survey done by Healix-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, Mumbai, revealed that the present pictorial warning on tobacco products has failed in its intention of discouraging tobacco use. Some 60 per cent of those who were surveyed said the picture didn't ring any alarm bell. "The survey was done in two phases. While in the first phase, we concentrated on four focus groups including the poor, middle class, youth and women with around eight to 10 members from each group, in the second phase we randomly surveyed around 600 people. Most of these people deny seeing any connection between scorpion and cancer," said Tsher-ing Doma Bhutia, communication manager, Healix.

"While a right picture can convey thousand words, a picture which is not effective doesn't make any dif-



FAILED EFFORT: Scorpion symbol don't scare smokers

ference. In countries like Brazil and Mauritius, after showing scary images of mouth cancer on tobacco packages, tobacco consumption has drastically come down," said Bhutia. The government needs to change the pictorial depiction on tobacco packages to something more effective, he said.

According to Dr Someshkar SP, surgical oncologist, Manipal Hospital, "An addict won't give up smoking seeing the image on the tobacco package. However,

it can dissuade new recruits. A scorpion doesn't convey the intended message. The best picture to ring the alarm would be a skull with two bones crossed."

It would have been more effective if pictures of cancer-afflicted like mouth cancer is depicted, says, feels Sudha Raghavendra, programme manager, Tobacco Cessation clinic, Nimhans.

However, the policy of banning smoking in public places by the government has been a very effective move. "This at least confirms that a non-smoker's health would not be affected," said Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, Associate professor, Dept of surgical oncology, Tata memorial hospital, Mumbai.

"The need for India at present is to have more tobacco cessation clinics. At present we have only 20 such clinics across India," said Bhutia. Counselling and nicotine replacement therapy are proven to work well in tobacco cessation, added Dr Chaturvedi.

Meanwhile, doctors have also expressed concern about the fact that children nowadays are getting addicted to smoking alarmingly early. Whereas, earlier you would see students class eight and nine having their first fag, now even fifth standard children are seen smoking.

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