

# Public Perspectives ...About Tobacco And Tobacco-related Products.... My Experiences

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I, Dr. Kshipra Deshpande, am currently pursuing my Ph.D and for that, I am working on one project. In this study project, I am giving training to PHC (Primary Health Centers) workers for early detection of oral cancer and Precancer. I gained a lot of experience during this tutoring. I became cognizant of the viewpoint of PHC employees and common people with respect to tobacco and tobacco-related habits. Few people have misconceptions or opinions about the causes of their different tobacco use behaviors. Many are aware of the detrimental consequences of their tobacco-related deleterious habits on their health, however, they are still not seriously bothered about it.

## *Quit Tobacco Chewing*



My aim is to demonstrate that oral cancer is the only cancer that can be 90% prevented by ceasing the usage of tobacco and tobacco-related products. People indulge in various habits, due to underlying different psychological problems. During these surveys conducted at PHCs, I came across different types of people. Some were educated with higher qualifications while some were illiterate. In the end, I observed that they had given numerous reasons about why they have these harmful habits. I have listed some public opinions here: -

I will start with PHC jobholders as I am giving training to them for early detection of oral cancer and precancer. Interestingly, I found that most of the PHC associates are tobacco users themselves. I was trying my ability to train these individuals at this point. A handful of PHC workers said they are aware of the unfavorable ramifications of using tobacco and tobacco-related products, but they justified their maladaptive behavior by saying that not every one of them would suffer from cancer so they wanted to relish the present without worrying about the future. I was momentarily stunned after witnessing their careless approach. For these educated people, who are already in the health profession, I had to make more efforts by explaining to them the genetic effects that they will carry forward to their upcoming generations.

After spending so much time and effort, I noticed an improvement in one of the medical staff members. As I taught them during training, one of the workers (having a smokeless tobacco chewing habit for more than 10 years) who had done the OSE (Oral Self Examination- which was part of my training module), found that he had developed reduced mouth opening. He consulted the oral surgeon at the higher center and was diagnosed with Gr III OSMF (Oral Submucous Fibrosis). He got operated and now he is fine. This event set a live example for all other PHC workers who are overindulged in various forms of tobacco habits.

After visiting many PHCs and giving training to all PHC workers; many of the PHC Medical Officers conveyed to me by messaging that this is a very good training you are giving to our health workers, which is also a need of hour in today's scenario.

I came across many laypeople, with tobacco habits with whom I discussed the ill effects of tobacco on health. Some were so reckless that they said "If we have to die one day then why bother to change now" (ek din to marna hi hain; to kyun na kha - pike mare); others asserted "Many of our antecedents, neighbors also had such habits but nothing serious happened to them, they all were fit and fine till their death which occurred due to old age" (hamara padosi/relative jis ko tambaku ke sath daru ki bhi aadat thi, puri zindagi bhar use kuch bhi nahi hua puri Zindagi kha-pike budha ho ke mar gaya wo...).

One day a lady was eating Kharra (one form of smokeless tobacco) in front of me and I shouted at her showing her the mouth cancer picture on the packet. When I turned to throw the packet, she exclaimed that the packet cost her 10 rupees, so I should not throw it away.

I angrily replied to her that she was concerned about the 10 rupees of this packet but this same thing might give her a grievous disease which would take lakhs to get cured. Additionally, the damage done to your health would also give you tremendous pain. She replied by saying, "The Government pays for our hospital bills, (hamara sara kharcha sarkar uthati hain) so we have no tension of financial loss." About her deteriorating health she said "I am very strong and nothing would happen to me that can give me pain" (konsi bhi bimari sahane ki takat hain muzme, main bahut kadak hoon).

I was speechless. From that day; I am asking myself

*Is it the system's fault?  
Or is it the government's  
policy?  
Or should the blame be  
on the individuals  
themselves?*

Our government is spending supplementary money on tobacco cessation programs and various policies for tobacco cessation, rather than whatever revenue the government is generating from the sale of tobacco and tobacco-related products. But what fruitful are these policies if the mindset of common people will not change and if they are not utterly aware of the deleterious effects of various forms of tobacco on health?

I had conducted a FGD on Tobacco Awareness in one of the summer youth camps. Thankfully in that camp, I did not find any youth indulged in counterproductive tendencies. Their perspective regarding laws and policies by the government to curb all types of tobacco products was that although the government is introducing policies, they are not operationalized in accordance with the protocols. They suggested that the government should properly implement these policies and take strict actions against violators.

Our younger cohort needs to be safeguarded from addiction to tobacco and tobacco products as later these regimens might prove dangerous for such individuals as well as for the growth of the nation.

To avert this from happening, stringent laws and directives should be enforced by the Indian government.

