



THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
School of Nursing

4/F William M W Mong Block
21 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong

TEL : (852) 3917 6600
FAX : (852) 2872 6079
EMAIL : nursing@hku.hk
WEBSITE : www.hku.hk/nursing

Head of School:

Professor Agnes Tiwari
DN (London); MSc (Surrey); PhD (Wollongong);
RN; RCNT; RNT; FAAN; CMgr FCMI

To the Panel on Health Services of the Legislative Council:

LC Paper No. CB(2)584/16-17(42)

Support the Enlargement of Pictorial Health Warnings

I am writing to show my strong support for the Government proposed measures to strengthen tobacco control by enlarging the pictorial health warnings to at least 85% of the cigarette pack area and increasing the number of forms of health warning to twelve.

My research interest focuses on tobacco control interventions in smokers diagnosed with cancers. Smoking not only causes many types of cancer but also worsens cancer treatment and prognosis of the patients who continue to smoke. In 2012, the research team conducted the first local and the largest scale of randomized clinical trial to test the effectiveness of using brief advice with motivational counselling to assist this target group to quit smoking funded by Health and Medical Research Fund. With brief advice and risk communication leaflet given to the recruited cancer patients (n=528), the smoking cessation rate was not significant compared with those without interventions provided after six months. Results showed that misconceptions of smoking and health such as denial of the association between smoking and cancer were usually found. Although the brief intervention clarified that smoking can cause many types of cancer and that not limited to lung cancer, it is hard to change patients' health risk perception immediately. In general, these cancer patients started to smoke at their young age (15 – 16 years old) and then continued to smoke for more than 40 years till the mean age at 59. For some smoking cancer patients, they thought that smoking is related to lung cancer only. Yet, smoking-induced cancers also include cancer of the larynx, esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, ureter, bladder, and colorectum, as well as acute myeloid leukemia. To review the current pictorial warnings on cigarette pack, only one of the warnings mentions "smoking causes lung cancer". Therefore, the current health warning content and numbers are obviously not sufficient enough to promote smokers' health risk perceptions. More numbers of health warnings should be added to enhance risk communication.

Dated back to 40 years ago in 1970s, smoking prevalence rate maintained high and there were no strict tobacco control in Hong Kong. Governmental measures on tobacco control were started since 1980s with the Council on Smoking and Health (COSH) established, to 1990s with prohibition on tobacco advertisement etc. and 2000s with pictorial warnings to be shown on cigarette pack plus great enhancement of tobacco tax. Smoking prevalence rate dropped prominently from over 20% to 10.5% in 2015. It is obvious that each tobacco measure contributes to the continuous reduction rate in smoking prevalence in a step-by-step manner. In addition, increasing the size (from 50% at present to 85%) of warnings on cigarette pack can catch greater attention and allows smokers to know more about the disadvantages of smoking. The pictorial warning on cigarette pack is the first critical health warning to the person who decides to smoke. This can also threaten the youth from getting into smoking or motivate the young smokers to quit as early as possible.

The proposed measure is an international trend in tobacco control which will effectively reduce the attractiveness of tobacco, motivate more smokers to quit and deter youth from trying the first cigarette.

Yours faithfully,
Cheung Tsz Yan, Yannes
Postdoctoral Fellow
School of Nursing
The University of Hong Kong
Email: yannes@hku.hk
Tel: 3917 6304