

A/Prof Au Eong Kah Guan, Head and Senior Consultant of the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences in Alexandra Hospital, believes in actively advising patients to quit smoking. In his line of work, he has found that the biggest motivation for his patients is the fear of the loss of sight. *"People go to the extreme of saying they would rather die than go blind,"* he related.

One of A/Prof Au Eong's success stories is a patient who was shocked to discover that he shared the same ailments as his own father and that heavy smoking contributed to these ailments.

Mr Khaw Gim Leong, in his 50s, suffers from cataracts and age-related macular degeneration (AMD)*, while his father is blind in both eyes due to advanced AMD.

is a well-established cause of blindness.

A/Prof Au Eong is optimistic about the effectiveness of encouragement from doctors in the long run. Even if a smoker is not willing to quit straight away, brief advice from a healthcare professional can help them move towards making a quit attempt in the future. Taking an active role to rally smokers to quit, A/Prof Au Eong has written many articles in the papers to explain how smoking can cause blindness.

"Given their professional training, healthcare personnel are more credible and smokers tend to listen to them. Because smoking harms every organ

Changing lives: Doctors make a difference

As a healthcare professional, you are in an ideal position to motivate your smoking patients to quit. Cigarette smoke contains over 4,000 active compounds; at least 400 are harmful to the body. As a doctor, you can talk to them about the physical effects of smoking and the benefits of quitting. You are in the best position to help as your brief advice can increase the likelihood of your patient quitting successfully.

A/Prof Au Eong advised Mr Khaw that quitting smoking could reduce the chance of his own condition deteriorating. *"The seriousness of his dad's condition was really a strong motivating factor for Mr Khaw to give up smoking,"* added A/Prof Au Eong.

"The doctor advised me to quit smoking immediately and after seeing how my father degenerated from a healthy person to what he is now, it breaks my heart," said Mr Khaw, who had been smoking for the past 30 years.

Within a fortnight, he went from 24 sticks a day to zero, thanks to A/Prof Au Eong's timely advice and his father's experience. *"It's not as difficult to quit as what others say,"* beamed Mr Khaw.

Mr Khaw isn't the only patient A/Prof Au Eong has helped: *"I've advised all my patients who smoke to quit smoking."* For almost all of his smoking patients, it is the first time they hear that smoking

of the body, doctors in various disciplines can help to persuade smokers to quit," A/Prof Au Eong concluded.



"Given their professional training, healthcare personnel are more credible and people tend to listen to them..." – A/Prof Au Eong

Your Advice is the Best Prescription

Like A/Prof Au Eong, you too can make a difference to your patients' lives. As someone whom your patients trust, you have a responsibility to encourage them to stop smoking. With your expertise, you can help them understand what smoking does to their bodies and how quitting can decrease the risk of smoking-related diseases and death. Your word is as good as a prescription: It can lead to better and healthier lives for your patients.

Find out how you can get involved at www.hpb.gov.sg/family_physician



Life. Live it strong!

* Age-related macular degeneration, often called AMD or ARMD, is the leading cause of vision loss and blindness in developed countries. AMD is a degeneration in the health of the macula, which is the part of the retina responsible for the sharp, central vision needed to read, recognise faces or drive.

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