

'Quitting smoking won't harm smokers'

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Health experts have brushed aside fears that withdrawal from smoking could have negative effects on the smoker's health.

According to Philippine Heart Association (PHA) president Nanette Rey, one of the obstacles that smokers face when they consider to stop smoking is the fear of its possible ill effects on the body. Rey, however, noted in a press conference yesterday that they have encountered people who claimed that they developed heart problems, for instance, after they quit smoking.

"But what we want to emphasize is that it's not because you suddenly stopped smoking that you've had problems. It's because you stopped too late and something irreversible has already happened to you," she added.

For his part, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, a former smoker, said it takes "personal will" for one to stop smoking.

"I used to smoke. You know, medical students are the worst smokers because they need to be awake because they have to study voluminous amounts of medical information," he maintained. But in studying pathology, he realized the impact of cigarettes on the body so he decided to quit. "It's really almost insane that you know what's going on and you still continue to be lured by smoking and the short term gratification it gives," he said. "It takes personal will to quit and then do it right away, cold turkey."

Duque recalled that after he quit smoking, he had to engage in exercises as he gained weight.

"When the nicotine coating on my taste buds was removed, I ate a lot so I had to exercise," he said.

According to pulmonologist and Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance Philippines executive director Maricar Limpin, those who experienced complications could already have the conditions even before they stopped smoking.

One of the common complaints of those who quit smoking is coughing out phlegm, said Limpin. She added that coughing up phlegm is not something to be alarmed about because it indicates that the function of the respiratory system is getting normalized.

"When people smoke, they have difficulty releasing phlegm because the normal mucociliary function of the airways gets damage, so their ability to cough up phlegm is affected," she explained.

Limpin maintained that while quitting smoking suddenly may work for some, others may need expert management so they should consult with a smoking cessation expert.

Currently, the Department of Health implements the "Quitline" program at the Lung Center of the Philippines to assist those who want to stop smoking.

Those interested may dial Quitline hotline 165364 or text "STOPSMOKE" to 29290-165364.

Meanwhile, one million children below 15 years old develop tuberculosis every year, with 239,000 or one in four of them dying, the latest report of The Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases showed.