

Benefits of Flexibility and Collaboration

Klamath County Public Health's TPEP has been working towards smokefree housing and earning buy in from landlords and housing authorities. I was looking into data for residential fires that were caused by cigarettes, so I contacted the local fire department to ask if they would share their data with me. This piqued the interest of the fire chief, Monte, so he invited me to his office to talk more about what I wanted to accomplish with the data.

As Monte and I discussed cigarette-related residential fires, he explained that he felt the bigger issue was people who use medical oxygen who smoke in their homes. In October of 2013 there was a double fatality in which two sisters were caught in a house fire caused by a smoker using medical oxygen. As Monte explained to me, smoking-related fires caused by medical oxygen may be rarer, but they're never small fires. They cause more serious injuries and fatalities because oxygen speeds up the burning process. He said he responded to a call in which an elderly man was smoking while also using his oxygen and his beard caught on fire, resulting in severe facial burns. The most recent fatal fire in October reaffirms Monte's concern.

From there we began to dialogue, and we decided to collaborate and focus smokers using medical oxygen rather than smokefree housing for the time being. First we were strategizing on how best to target the medical providers who were prescribing the oxygen to their patients. However, these patients are already being told by their doctors they need to quit smoking, so we wanted to come at patients from a new angle. We decided to target the oxygen supplier, Norco.

Monte and I took a meeting at Norco and explained our position. Norco was extremely supportive and wanted to collaborate with us. We spoke with them about their protocol when they deliver oxygen supplies to a smoker and they showed us their materials. Patients receive a handbook that includes the dangers of smoking while on oxygen and a no-smoking sign to hang on their doors at home. Patients also must sign a form acknowledging that they received the information.

These are great tools, but Monte and I felt that more could be done. We provided them with very short YouTube videos that the service delivery workers could show to patients and their families when they explain the dangers of smoking when using oxygen. These videos (links below) are much more powerful than hearing statistics or danger warnings, and can easily be shown on an iPad or iPhone.

In addition, we want to offer these people cessation resources. I created a Norco-specific fax referral form for the Quit Line and explained the ease and benefits of using this system. I also provided Quit Line palm cards for their employees to give to clients who smoke (or live with smokers).

Although my original intent was to promote smokefree housing, this partnership naturally evolved into an effort I consider to be a success. So often in public health we focus our attention on medical providers, but working with Norco and the fire department was an innovative and effective way to reach smokers from a new angle. This partnership reaffirmed the importance of being flexible and gaining partnerships as they emerge.

Cigarette and oxygen: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jxp_wpDufdg

Cigarette and oxygen: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtCG7RocawQ>

Rag with/without oxygen saturation: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wMRL2bVKc4>

Cigarette and oxygen cannula: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JStmjt1oURU>