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REASONS FOR UNDERUTILISATION OF DRUG THERAPY FOR SMOKING CESSATION AMONG MALAYSIAN ABORIGINAL SMOKERS

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Introduction: The smoking rate among Malaysian aboriginal people is double the rate of other Malaysians. Smoking is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in aboriginal people but smoking cessation among this population is very low. At present, pharmacotherapy for smoking cessation is not subsidised in the health services.

Objective and aim: The study aimed to explore potential reasons for the underutilisation of drug therapy for smoking cessation among aboriginal and non-aboriginal smokers.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among aboriginal and non-aboriginal smokers in the state of Selangor between March 2010-August 2010. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire on demographics, smoking behaviour, physician counselling on smoking cessation and perceptions about drug therapy for smoking cessation.

Results: The overall response rate was 85% (250 Aboriginal smokers and 105 non-aboriginal smokers). Majority of smokers reported smoking cessation or reduction in the previous 6 months (Aboriginal 62% vs non-aboriginal 68%). Aboriginal participants were less likely to seek physician services ($p=0.001$) and less willing to use nicotine replacement therapy ($p=0.01$) or varenicline ($p=0.001$). Among all smokers, having to buy the medication and price of the medication was the most important factor associated with less willingness to use the drugs but advice from physician was associated with willingness to use the drugs.

Conclusions: Regardless of ethnic origin, smokers were interested to quit smoking, but cost of medication may explain their lower uptake of drug therapy. Malaysian policy makers should consider making the drugs for smoking cessation freely available in the Malaysian health services.