



Lebanese medical students' intention to deliver smoking cessation advice

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract Objectives: Objectives of this study were to examine the constructs of the Theory of Planned Behavior and determine how they predict Lebanese medical students' behavioral intention to advise patients to quit smoking.

Study design: This was a cross-sectional study conducted among 191 medical students from six medical schools in Lebanon.

Methods: The instrument contained scales that measured attitudes toward the behavior, behavioral beliefs, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Psychometric properties of the scale were examined. Item to total scale score correlations were determined and linear regression was conducted to predict the intention to advise smokers to quit.

Results: Respondents had a positive, but not very high, intention to deliver smoking cessation advice. Students reported a positive attitude toward advising patients to quit cigarette smoking and a strong belief in the physician's obligations in smoking cessation advising. The majority reported lack of time to provide smoking cessation advice, insufficient knowledge of pharmacological aids, and the lack of openness of the patient to receive the advice. The attitude scale was the only variable that yielded a significant prediction of the intended behavior.

Conclusions: The construct of attitude toward the behavior appeared to be the most predictive of the intention to deliver advice to quit smoking among Lebanese medical students. Focusing training efforts on this construct could improve the rate of delivery of brief cessation counseling.

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1. Introduction

In Lebanon, like in the rest of the world, tobacco dependence is recognized as the greatest preventable cause of disease and death [18]. The World Health Organization has repeatedly emphasized the role of health professionals, in particular physicians, in efforts to promote tobacco control in the public health agenda [17]. Physicians can have a critical role in reducing the tobacco burden, as even brief advice from health professionals can substantially increase smoking cessation rates [17,4]. Although the provision of pharmacotherapy for tobacco dependence, where available and affordable, has been shown to enhance the effectiveness of smoking cessation advice [6,7], smoking cessation advice alone is also a cost-effective intervention and is efficient [4,6,8]. The medical community in Lebanon is poorly committed to tobacco dependence treatment policies [9]. Many clinicians lack knowledge about the importance of identifying patients who are smokers, which treatments are efficacious, and how such treatments can be delivered. Additionally, they may fail to intervene because of inadequate clinic-level or institutional support for routine assessment and treatment of tobacco use [10].

Little is known regarding the competency related to, and the current practice of, tobacco dependence treatment delivery among Lebanese physicians to patients who smoke. To address this gap and respond to the recommendations to increase the competency of physicians in tobacco dependence interventions [17,4], this research focused on medical students. Medical students as future physicians, educators, and researchers that are open to innovation are in a key position to influence future tobacco cessation programs [10].

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been developed to predict an individual's behavior and posits that the best predictor of a given behavior is the behavioral intention to perform it [1,2]. Intentions to perform the behavior are a function of the following constructs, according to the model. The first construct is attitude toward the behavior, which is influenced by beliefs about the action and one's motivation to comply with the action [1]. The second construct is subjective norms, which are influenced by normative beliefs and motivation to comply with norms [1]. The third construct is perceived behavioral control, which is influenced by self-efficacy or perceived control and perceived power [1]. Even if beliefs can be changed with success, the effect on the performance of the intended behavior would be

facilitated by the proposed causal chain of constructs listed above within the TPB. The TPB has been successfully used to predict a wide range of social behaviors, including health behaviors [13,5] and particularly a physician's delivery of preventive services [2,12,16]. The main objectives of this study were to examine the components of the TPB and determine how they predict Lebanese medical students' behavioral intention to deliver advice to quit cigarette smoking.

2. Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted during the 2009–2010 school year among 6th year medical students enrolled at six medical schools in Lebanon. The study received exemption from the Ohio State University Office of Responsible Research and was conducted according to their approved protocol.

2.1. Study population

A listing of all colleges in Lebanon that offer degrees in medicine was obtained from the WHO 2007 updated list [19]. There are currently seven listed medical schools. A letter of invitation to participate in the study was e-mailed directly to the dean's office of each medical school. A response with permission to conduct the survey was promptly received from 6 medical schools. One medical school opened for enrollment in 2007 and was not included in the study.

All 6th-year medical students were the target population for the study in programs that have four years of medical school education following an undergraduate degree, and medical students classified as one year before their graduation year from all other programs. To be eligible, a medical student had to be in the target year for the medical school and had to understand English to be able to complete the survey. Medical students in the introductory years were not targeted because they are still learning basic sciences and medical students in their graduating year are hard to reach because they are mostly in clinical rotations and rarely in the classic classroom setting.

2.2. Instrument development

The survey instrument was developed to measure the constructs of the TPB: (1) attitude toward behavior; (2) perceived subjective norms; and (3) perceived behavioral control. To be consistent with

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