



## COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



### **New Year, New Goals: The One-Two Punch of Behavior Change**

Every January, millions of Americans resolve to change their behavior in one way or another. Among the most popular goals are losing weight, quitting smoking, getting more exercise and spending more time with family. All are admirable ambitions, well worth pursuing. But if you are a smoker, there is nothing better to consider than kicking the nicotine habit.

Tobacco use in the U.S. contributes to more than 450,000 deaths each year, and of those deaths, 170,000 are from cancer. By quitting, you add new healthy days, even years to your life. You lower your risk of dying from not only lung cancer, but also heart disease, stroke, chronic bronchitis, emphysema and more than 13 other kinds of cancer.

But making a resolution isn't enough. Social scientists say there are two basic things that make behavior change easier. The first is to break it down into baby steps. "S.M.A.R.T." goals, those that are **specific, measurable, achievable, realistic** and **time-sensitive**, are best. For smokers it could be as simple as making a written list of all the reasons to quit and setting a quit date. For some, an appointment with a physician to discuss medicines that can help with withdrawal is what is needed. For each individual, the plan is different. One size does not fit all.

The second necessary ingredient is to change your environment. You can support behavior change by removing ash trays, cleaning your car of its smoky odor, spending free time in smoke-free environments such as malls, libraries or museums. Avoiding drinks like wine and beer that for some can trigger the desire to smoke are other tactics. Drink extra water or seltzer, flavored or plain.

Let's face it...smoking is slow suicide. While life expectancy is increasing for those with high socioeconomic status and more education, it is decreasing in the lower socioeconomic status and less educated groups. The explanation is in large part attributable to higher rates of smoking. Frankly, continuing to smoke, given all that we know, is not very smart.

I understand that quitting is indeed difficult. We all lack self-control at one time or another such as when we should just say no to an extra helping of food or dessert. I can hardly imagine the grip smoking has when nicotine causes physiologic craving as well.

Every smoker should try to stop, and try again if necessary. Most successful quitters need multiple attempts to get it right. In Putnam you can call the NYS Smokers' Quitline at 1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487), or visit [www.nysmokefree.com](http://www.nysmokefree.com).

Personally, I still haven't recovered from the shock that seven of our legislators voted against the recent legislation to ban the sale of tobacco in pharmacies. Why they were unable to rally around the message that a place for health care products should not dispense disease, and ultimately death, still bewilders me. I have no intention of giving up on this important measure.