

LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ellen Giarelli, EdD, RN, CS, CRNP
Associate Editor

“Butt Busters”: Kids Against Smoking A Program to Educate Elementary School Students About the Dangers of Tobacco Use

Stephanie McMahon, RN, MSN, CRNP, OCN®, Carole Benton, RN, OCN®, Pat Dittig, RN, MSN, Katie McDermott, RN, BSN, OCN®, Anne Kaufman, RN, BSN, OCN®, Sandra Lee Schafer, RN, MN, AOCN®, and Kimberly Power, RN, MSN

According to the American Cancer Society (ACS) (2004), lung cancer is the number one cause of cancer deaths. In 2004, an estimated 186,550 people will be diagnosed and 165,130 will die from this malignancy (ACS). Research indicates that more than 90% of lung cancers are related to smoking. The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, using data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reported that 4.5 million children younger than 18 are smokers (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2003).

Oncology nurses play an essential role in alerting the public to important issues in cancer. Nurses can educate children about the dangers of smoking and help to influence the decision to never develop a smoking habit. This article describes a collaborative program developed by the Greater Pittsburgh (PA) Chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society (GPC-ONS) and Cancer Care Inc. in New York, NY. The primary goal of the project was to increase children's awareness of the dangers of tobacco during Lung Cancer Awareness Week in November 2001.

Background

In September 2001, ONS approached GPC-ONS to participate in a project sponsored by Cancer Care Inc. At the first meeting, ONS staff and interested members of the GPC-ONS board gathered to discuss potential interest in developing a program for Lung Cancer Awareness Week. GPC-ONS was chosen to receive a \$4,500 grant to develop a program, dinner, public awareness campaign, or other community-based event to increase awareness of lung cancer and tobacco use.

The planning group consisted of seven members from the GPC-ONS board, whose work experience ranged from office or hospital clinic nurses, radiation therapy nurses, and a research-based nurse to a clinical nurse specialist for a biotechnology company. Their

educational backgrounds were just as varied, including diploma, bachelor's, and master's level preparation. At the first meeting, the planning group considered several proposals, including a one-time educational program using news personalities in the Pittsburgh area, advertisements and interviews with lung cancer survivors in the local newspaper's health section, an educational report on a local news station, and an outreach program.

The second meeting centered on determining which of the proposed programs would reach the greatest audience and have the most impact. To determine this, the group used the following criteria: volunteer availability, cost, and the ability to replicate the program. After much discussion, the group decided to target children in grades four through six, the age at which peer pressure begins to be most evident and preadolescent experimentation begins. Children of these ages still are likely to be receptive to adult influence on their behaviors. The group believed that a creative activity would be most engaging to this cohort of children and considered a poster or essay contest about the hazards of using tobacco and smoking. If possible, the program ideally would be a part of their health education class. The name “Butt Busters”: Kids Against Smoking was selected.

To move the project forward, each committee member was assigned a specific task and deadline. Grade-school principals in the surrounding area were contacted and invited to participate. Requests for tobacco-related information were forwarded to the ACS. Letters were drafted to introduce ONS and the GPC-ONS project to the students and their parents and guardians. Pre- and post-testing was planned to assess the participants' knowledge before and after the program. Because children in these grades typically enjoy graphic representations of reality, the planning group looked for items to bring to the program that would have visual impact

and engage learners. To encourage interaction among the students and presenters, the committee borrowed “What's in the Box” from ACS. The kit is a demonstration box full of poisons that actually are found in cigarettes. The University of Pittsburgh Gross Pathology Department lent a specimen of a diseased lung with a tumor for the students to review. Committee members made up samples of phlegm for examination by the students. In an essay or poster contest, winners would receive trophies for first, second, and third place and honorable mention. Each child who participated would receive a T-shirt. To thank the students and teachers, the group provided funding for a pizza party to

Stephanie McMahon, RN, MSN, CRNP, OCN®, is an oncology sales representative for Amgen, Inc., in Thousand Oaks, CA; Carole Benton, RN, OCN®, is a collaborative practice RN for the Division of Gynecology/Oncology and the Women's Cancer Center at Magee-Womens Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA; Pat Dittig, RN, MSN, is a self-employed counselor, writer, and community activist in Pittsburgh; Katie McDermott, RN, BSN, OCN®, is a chemotherapy nurse for Hematology Oncology Associates at Sewickley Hospital in Pennsylvania; Anne Kaufman, RN, BSN, OCN®, is a quality assurance coordinator in the Department of Radiation Oncology at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Center Shadyside in Pennsylvania; Sandra Lee Schafer, RN, MN, AOCN®, is a clinical nurse specialist with an independent practice in Pittsburgh; and Kimberly Power, RN, MSN, is an office-based nurse at Hematology Oncology Associates in Monroeville, PA. This work was supported by the Greater Pittsburgh (PA) Chapter of the Oncology Nursing Society.

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be given at the discretion of the teachers. The committee planned to present a plaque to the principals to acknowledge the school staffs' participation in "Butt Busters."

"Butt Busters": The Program

The first program was implemented at Greenfield Elementary School in Pittsburgh on November 14, 2001. Oncology nurses visited the school three times over a four-week period. The school had two sixth-grade classes, and the art and health teachers allotted 20 minutes for the GPC-ONS team to present the program to the students. The program was presented in three parts.

Part 1

Part 1 was comprised of introductions, pretesting, instruction, demonstration, and post-testing. The goals were

- To introduce the nurses and ONS
- To inquire about the smoking history of family members
- To assess how many students had seen commercials for smoking either in magazines or billboards
- To determine how many knew that the next day was National Smoke-Out Day
- To conduct the pretest, consisting of 10 true-or-false questions to which the students responded via a show of hands (time constraints precluded a more formal test process)
- To inquire whether they had any questions
- To inform the students about the exhibits the group brought for them to examine and to show them the damage that can occur to lungs (i.e., the diseased lung, "What's in the Box," and the jars of phlegm).

The students were invited to come to the front of the room to go through the "What's in the Box", check out the phlegm, and look at the lung tissue. The hands-on experience was a hit. The children were fascinated by the display.

Part 2

Part 2 was the practice session. To demonstrate how difficult breathing can be when the lungs are diseased, the students performed a simple exercise. Each child received two straws, a normal-sized straw and a cocktail stirrer. They then were asked to

- Do 10 jumping jacks while standing beside the desk.
- Breathe into the large straw.
- Do 10 more jumping jacks.
- Pinch their nostrils together and breathe through the little straw.

The presenters then explained that this is how people with emphysema and cancer breathe.

Part 3

The final part in the project asked students to describe what they had learned by expressing their thoughts and ideas creatively in a poster or essay of 250 words. The last part included prizes and handouts. The presenters explained that the students had two weeks to complete either the poster or essay and that each participant would receive a T-shirt (the presenters wore the T-shirts to the program).

The children created 22 posters (no essays were submitted). During the next two weeks, the planning committee judged the entries and returned to the school for a small assembly of both classes to award the winners. A member of the planning committee hung the posters in her game room, and five members of the committee, along with five of their children (ages 8–17), reviewed the posters and cast their votes for first, second, and third place and honorable mention. The posters were judged for neatness, originality, understanding of content presented, and ability to convey the hazards associated with using tobacco products.

Press Coverage

Thanks to the ONS public relations department, the first program had broad media coverage. A local newspaper featured the project in an article titled the "Ick Factor" in the health section. The story included an excellent description of the project and a picture of one of the students looking at the diseased lung.

The planning group returned to the school two weeks after the program to return the posters and give out the trophies. All the students wore their "Butt Busters" T-shirts to the assembly. The principal, the art, health, and homeroom teachers; and all of the sixth-grade students attended. The program was as much fun for the team as it was for them. The sixth-grade students sent a note thanking the team for letting them participate in the project. The first program was a success.

Ongoing Programs

GPC-ONS planned four additional programs, two per year for two years. Six programs have been completed since November 2001, including one in the fall of 2004. One targeted school had more than 200 sixth-grade students; however, budget and space constraints made enrolling such a large student population impossible.

The Budget

The initial budget of \$4,500 from Cancer Care Inc. was not spent for the first program. The remainder of the money was added to an additional \$750 received from a lung cancer awareness grant. The planning group purchased 100 T-shirts, art supplies, and trophies and provided funding for three pizza parties. The program still carries a balance of \$1,700.

Challenges

Overall, several challenges were associated with implementing the project. The first was generating enough interest to maintain adequate participation among chapter members. To keep this kind of project viable, at least four to six nurses should be trained and willing to volunteer to go to schools throughout the year. Besides finding individuals willing to donate personal time, the planning team was challenged to secure adequate funding. The initial expense for T-shirts was \$1,100, and other costs accrued for poster materials, printing of handouts, and prizes. Ongoing financial support and contributions of time are essential for the success of the program.

Future Plans

The team plans to continue the program as long as funding can be secured. The project helped to increase student awareness of the dangers of smoking; hopefully, the children will choose never to smoke. A future project may be a follow-up study to determine whether an association exists between students' participation in the program and use of tobacco in their teen years. For now, the planning team is enjoying bringing the program to schools and working with students.

The program illustrates how oncology nurses, as members of ONS, can be agents of cancer prevention. It highlights one way that professional nurses serve the community by encouraging preventive cancer care. GPC-ONS recommends forming partnerships with local schools to develop programs that present information vital to the health and well-being of children.

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