



Nip It in the Butt: Breathing in the Truth about Tobacco

An Innovative Education Program is Affecting Community Health

by Allison Griffin

The health risks of tobacco use are well known. Yet many adults, children, and teens continue to smoke and use chewing tobacco. A 2004 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study showed that 80 percent of smokers begin using cigarettes before age 18. Each day in the United States, approximately 3,450 young people between the ages of 12 and 17 smoke their first cigarette, and an estimated 850 youth become daily cigarette smokers. A similar study by the American Lung Association found 90 percent of smokers begin before age 21.

In 2010 the Curtis and Elizabeth Anderson Cancer Institute at Memorial University Medical Center in Savannah, Georgia, decided to create a tobacco education program that could be shared with area schools—*Nip It in the Butt: Breathing in the Truth about Tobacco*. Initially, the program was funded by a \$45,500 grant from the Southeast Georgia Cancer Alliance of the Georgia Cancer Coalition. Since then, additional community partners (the Department of Community Health) and private foundations (the Anderson Family Foundation grant) have joined forces with us to keep the program growing.

Nip It in the Butt's anti-smoking message is shared with school children ages 5 through 18 in the 9-1 Coastal Health District of Southeast Georgia, which includes Chatham, Effingham, Liberty, Bryan, Long, McIntosh, Glynn, and Camden counties. Our trained health educator, Meghan Beytagh, travels to the schools and conducts 30-minute presentations to teach students about the dangers of smoking. During the 2010-2011 school year, Beytagh spoke with 27,056 students at 56 schools in five of the targeted counties. Of the 56 schools, 41 were public, 15 were private, and 1 was a co-op of home-schooled students.

Program Components

The educational program includes a 10-minute video produced by the Curtis and Elizabeth Anderson Cancer Institute. In the video, doctors, community leaders, and cancer survivors talk about the dangers of tobacco use. The video is posted to

depicting tongue cancer and hairy tongue syndrome.

Each education session also includes before and after surveys to help us measure what students learned from our presentations. We used the help of an outside online vendor, Zoomerang.com, and pub-



Meghan Beytagh, outreach educator for the Nip It in the Butt program, pictured with the 2010-2011 coloring contest winners.

Memorial University Medical Center's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/memorialhealth) so that students, educators, and parents can watch it at any time. We also link to the video from our website at: www.memorialhealth.com/nipit.

Various education props are used in our educational presentation, including a foot-controlled "breathing" swine lung display that compares a healthy lung to one exposed to secondhand smoke. We show students a rubber face model that reveals the effects of tobacco on the skin. We pass around a jar of tar to show students what cigarettes leave in their body. And we have a mouth model

lished the survey on our website.

To further communicate our message, we designed two different leave-behind pieces targeted to two different age groups. For students in grades K through 5, we created a coloring book that features a word scramble game, pictures to color, and free space where students are encouraged to draw a picture of what they learned. We sponsored a *Nip It* coloring contest, and in August 2011, our physicians and staff gathered to view the more than 150 drawings that were submitted to us. The coloring contest winners and their parents were invited to a morning reception

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that included a guided tour of the Curtis and Elizabeth Anderson Cancer Institute. The winning students received a framed certificate and a \$25 gift card to applaud their work.



As our *Nip It* program has grown in popularity, we've been invited to participate in health fairs, corporate events, and speaking engagements. A total of 2,884 additional students were reached through these alternate venues. The *Nip It* program has also become a voice to promote Memorial University Medical Center's adult smoking cessation program and the Georgia Tobacco Quit Line (1.877.270.STOP).

Behavior Modification

According to a 2005 study done by the CDC, 23 percent of high school students reported smoking cigarettes in the last month, compared with a 2003 study of high school students that showed 21.9 percent smoked in the last month. While this data is

received feedback that we're affecting lives and modifying behaviors. For example:

- At one high school, a student reported that half of the males in the freshman class quit using chewing (smokeless) tobacco after our presentation taught them that it is as harmful as cigarettes.
- Our tri-fold brochure was spotted in the storefront window of a local business.
- We've received numerous email and phone requests for pictures of our lung display and copies of our video. One such request came from a nurse who phoned from the state of Missouri.
- Thank-you notes have come in from parents, students, school nurses, and principals offering words of encour-



Coloring contest winners proudly display their winning entries and awards.

For students in grades 6 through 12, we produced a tri-fold brochure. The students are encouraged to share the brochure with their parents to facilitate family discussion.

By far, our most popular leave-behind items are our specially designed *Nip It* silly bands. These elastic wrist bands come in two shapes, the *Nip It* dog (our program mascot) and the orange dove from the Curtis and Elizabeth Anderson Cancer Institute logo. Silly bands are popular with students of all ages. Children often swap them with others and talk about where the bands came from and what their shape signifies. We believe our silly bands help the anti-tobacco message ripple beyond the classroom.

Call to Action

To learn more about our *Nip It in the Butt* program, go to www.memorialhealth.com/aci

somewhat discouraging, it is far better than the 1997 level of the same survey, which was 36.4 percent.

There is no concrete evidence at this time to show why the teen smoking statistics have declined since 1997, but some believe it is due to improved awareness of the harmful effects of tobacco use and the rising cost of tobacco products. Others feel it is due to the fact that the media no longer glamorize smoking. While we cannot measure the exact impact of our *Nip It in the Butt* program, we have

agement and thanking us for sharing such important information.

The 2011-2012 school year is well underway, and we're reaching more students than ever before. In October 2011, we received a 2011 ACCC Innovator Award and presented at the ACCC 28th National Oncology Conference in Seattle. We hope that other cancer programs across the country will be inspired to replicate *Nip It in the Butt* in their own communities. 📌

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