YOUNG ADULTS’ INTEREST IN ORDERING NICOTINE PATCHES AND GUM VIA AN ONLINE ORDERING SYSTEM


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BACKGROUND

Young adults have the highest prevalence of tobacco use of all age groups.¹ Most want to quit, and express interest in using nicotine replacement products.² ³ Few, however, ask for or receive support from clinicians.⁴ To facilitate young adults’ access to nicotine replacement products, Leave The Pack Behind (an Ontario government-funded, age-tailored tobacco control program) recently established an online ordering platform offering free, 8-week treatment courses of nicotine patches or gum to young adults who meet health eligibility criteria and agree to complete 3 research surveys.

We examined the demographic and tobacco use characteristics of young adults who accessed nicotine replacement products through the online platform.

METHODS

The online ordering system was modelled on the STOP study. All orders were shipped directly to service-users.

Recruitment:
The ordering system launched in September 2013, and was consistently promoted through social and traditional media on all 44 Ontario post-secondary campuses. (Limited promotion occurred in the community; extensive promotion began in January 2014).

Health eligibility criteria:
• Resident of Ontario and between 18 - 29 years of age
• Not pregnant or breastfeeding
• Not diagnosed with any medical condition listed on the product monograph
• Smoked cigarettes daily or almost daily for the past 3 months
**Intervention:**
- a standard 8-week supply of nicotine patch or gum to use according to package directions
- a 12-page booklet with instructions on nicotine product use, Frequently Asked Questions about the nicotine patch/gum, contact information for Smokers’ Helpline and information about the research being conducted
- an age-tailored self-help booklet about smoking and quitting
- proactive support e-mails integrating facts about quitting with short, supportive messages and referral information to Smokers’ Helpline
- access to additional programs and supports from Leave The Pack Behind and other partners (e.g., Smokers’ Helpline, Crush The Crave, etc.)

Baseline data captured included standard validated smoking and quitting measures, as well as questions related to intentions of use of the nicotine patch/gum, participants’ health, and use of various substances.

**RESULTS**
- Between September 30 and January 12, 2,271 individuals visited the online ordering site
  - 1,607 (71%) completed the screening
  - 1,128 (70%) met (age, health, residency) eligibility and completed the baseline survey
- 61% ordered patch / 39% ordered gum
- Age = 23.7 years ($SD = 3.4$)

**Demographic Characteristics of Young Adult Smokers who Ordered Patch/Gum Online (N = 1,128)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schooling</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not in school</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attending a college or university</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>36%</td>
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**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study demonstrate that young adult smokers are interested in nicotine replacement therapies and are willing to seek treatment.

» In the first 105 days, over 1,100 young adult smokers across Ontario ordered patch/gum from the online platform.
  • Service-users were a heterogeneous group of heavy and light smokers, males and females, students and non-students.

» Although 44% of smokers were light smokers (smoking < 10 cigarettes per day), a high level of nicotine dependence was observed with 74% having their first cigarette within one hour of waking.
  • Despite reporting high levels of dependence, similar proportions of light smokers ordered patches and (52%) and gum (48%).
  • In comparison, heavy smokers more often ordered patches (68%) than gum (32%) suggesting that these smokers are choosing products that fit with their level of smoking.

» Today’s young adults are accustomed to the ease and immediacy of online transactions. This online platform meets a need that has not been filled before. It appears to be an appealing, universal service used by all young adults.
CONCLUSION

» Given the age of cessation strongly impacts the reversibility of smoking related health risks, young adults should be offered or referred to evidence based interventions. Multiple failed attempts, older age, and stronger addiction cannot be seen as necessary indications for nicotine replacement therapies.

» Referring young adult smokers to an online ordering system for free nicotine patches and gum represents a valuable treatment option for busy clinicians.

» We encourage health care professionals to refer their young adult patients to this service. Patient referral cards are available from Leave The Pack Behind.

FUTURE RESEARCH

» Follow-up will demonstrate effectiveness of offering this to heavy and light smokers. Usage patterns and cessation outcomes are under investigation.

REFERENCES


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