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## **During Tough Times, Program Expands to Help Wisconsin Military Personnel and Veterans Quit Tobacco**

The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line announces an expansion of Operation Quit Tobacco, an innovative program designed to help Wisconsin military personnel and veterans quit tobacco addiction. Effective today, Operation Quit Tobacco offers coaching and a full course of free medication through the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line to all Wisconsin military personnel (active and veterans) who want to quit tobacco use. Research indicates that tobacco use rates among military personnel are extremely high and tend not to decrease upon return from active duty. This could result in an epidemic of lung cancer in years to come.

All military personnel—active duty, Wisconsin National Guard members, reservists and veterans—can call the Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) to receive free coaching as well as a full eight-week supply of nicotine patches, lozenges or gum.

“Increasingly, our deployed soldiers begin using tobacco products while they’re serving in Iraq and Afghanistan,” said Dr. Michael Fiore, director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI). “They’re coming back addicted to nicotine. Operation Quit Tobacco offers them free help so they can live longer, healthier lives.”

"The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs assists and supports Wisconsin veterans and their families to ensure they receive the services and benefits they need," said department Acting Secretary Ken Black. "Operation Quit Tobacco is one more way to help promote a healthier lifestyle."

**Troops at Risk.** U.S. military personnel and veterans are at high risk for nicotine addiction. One official with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) puts the smoking rates of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan at greater than half, compared to a 19 percent smoking rate in the general population (*Military Medicine*, May 2008, Jean C. Beckham et al). About 13 percent of troops chew tobacco, compared to just 3 percent of Americans in the general population. Nearly 23 percent of veterans smoke, according to the VA. According to the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, soldiers who deployed

(more)

and reported combat exposure were at 1.6 times greater odds of initiating smoking and at 1.3 times greater odds of resuming smoking.

**History repeating.** Smoking among servicemen starting in World War II led to a nine-fold increase in lung cancer deaths by 1980. There is evidence that smoking may double the risk of soldiers experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (*Archives of General Psychiatry*, November 2005).

"We are excited that Operation Quit Tobacco, and programs like it, are available to our military personnel and veterans," said Capt. Angela Joseph-Gaffke, Wisconsin National Guard's deputy state surgeon and certified occupational health nurse. "The more resources available to service members, the better we can help them reach their optimal health and medical readiness."

When military personnel call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, they will receive free help in developing an individualized quit plan. Quit Line coaches will proactively call them back at times agreed upon by the caller. This approach can quadruple the success of a quit attempt. The Quit Line also connects troops and veterans to services provided through Veterans Affairs.

Operation Quit Tobacco initially launched in 2006, providing coaching and two-week's worth of stop-smoking medication. Since then, 500 Wisconsinites have accessed the program.

"Our troops do so much to protect us," said Fiore. "This is a way to give back by helping to protect them from future harm caused by tobacco use."

The Wisconsin Tobacco Quit Line is a program of the Wisconsin Department of Health.

**Wisconsin Tobacco  
Quit Line**

**1-800-QUIT-NOW**

Hours: 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.  
daily

At other times, leave a  
message.

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