

The Cancer Moonshot: What's Menthol and Emotional Brain Training Got To Do With It? Everything! co-hosted by the National Behavioral Health Network for Tobacco & Cancer Control

Post-webinar Q and A

9/12/24

1. . Tobacco Control & Public Health Policy

- Question: Your thoughts on addressing the other stressors that are driving people to use tobacco (SDOH/barriers to mental healthcare, affordable housing, parental leave, etc.), versus teaching people to manage their stress?
- Answer: The other stressors are societal burdens which require solutions beyond any one individual. Such solutions must be comprehensive and approached from both top down and bottom up (and sides in, sides out). In my thinking, an ideal solution is moving toward helping people have access to getting their basic needs met, money in their pockets, providing them an opportunity to live well and wholesomely, and giving them every opportunity to be as stress free as possible. Economists may beg to differ, so because I'm not one, my personal experiences have informed my thinking. I have a sense of knowing the freedom that comes with mobility and having money in my pocket without being a stressed-out consumer where I'm buying things I don't need to fill stress-induced voids in my life. (Oops, did I say all that? Yeah, I did.) In other words, having tools that help one get out of stress levels 3, 4, and 5 is crucial for everyone, but especially for those of us disproportionately affected by these "other stressors," so we, too, can "sit at the table" and contribute to working on solutions. Will relieving stress be enough to make racism and other inequities disappear? No, probably not; and definitely, not immediately.
- Question: What are your thoughts on the progress of the menthol flavor restriction given that the FDA has authorized some menthol flavored vapes for marketing? WA State (where I am located) will have a flavor restriction bill this upcoming legislative session.
- Answer: SLOW, very slow, if not stagnant, especially at the federal level. The work being done at the local and state level is extremely important and allows for educational and advocacy efforts that stem from community engagement and capacity building. The resulting support and buy-in for these policies coming from within the jurisdiction are also likely to be reflective of the community's input. This increased community capacity and engagement are also extremely important should there be a need to follow through on enforcement after the promulgation of a new law. There may still be tobacco industry interference at local and state levels from start to finish (and beyond) of any policy, but there is generally more access for local advocates and policymakers to participate in the process and counter this interference in whatever ways that reflect the needs of their community and residents.

- Question: Has there been any new information over the past month from the Harris-Walz campaign or the Trump-Vance campaign on the Cancer Moonshot and the continued aggressive marketing of mentholated commercial tobacco products in communities of color (especially to those under age 25)?
- Answer: No, at least not known publicly. President Biden said during his address to the Nation following his decision to step out of the election that the Cancer Moonshot was still one of his top priorities.
- Question: Have there been any court rulings that acknowledge damages and intentional faults of tobacco in targeting Black / Brown people of color as consumers, such as Camel brand advertising...?
- Answer: Yes. The one that quickly comes to mind is the case against Lorillard (Newport Menthol Cigarettes), filed and won by the family of Marie Evans.
- Question: To a non-expert, it seems like cessation services are all over the map (literally and figuratively). How can we get best practices everywhere, especially in light of more places phasing out sales entirely?
- Answer: [Yerger] This is an important question to ask, since there are "more places phasing out sales entirely." I will defer this question to the UCSF Smoking Cessation Leadership Center, as they have national and local partnerships that support an infrastructure that would be needed. I will say, there would need to be a comprehensive approach that would be linguistically, culturally, and community tailored, reflecting not only the needs of people who smoke, but their voices, too.

Answer: [SCLC] The quitline is an evidence-based service that double's a person's chances of quitting. 1 800 QUIT NOW is the router number that anyone can call from any part of the nation and be sent to their local quitline. The North American Quitline Consortium assures standards and practices are met by all services. The CDC Office of Smoking and Health regularly refers callers to 1 800 QUIT NOW during their National Tips from Former Smokers' television ads which is a large driver but ever state promotes and has a service of some sort. For details on quitlines visit <https://www.naquitline.org/>

2. Behavioral Science & Tobacco Cessation Techniques

- Question: In a previous training, we were told that those smokers who use menthol flavored cigarettes are more difficult to quit using than non-flavored cigarettes. Is this accurate?

- Answer: Yes. There is also a dearth of evidence showing the efficacy of any cessation program targeting menthol smokers.
- Question: Thank you for a great talk! My question is: Does it matter when and how often the training (think they mean the AP) is exercised? For example, does it work the best right before the smoker has the urge of smoking, or encounters stress instances?
- Answer: I would say those examples would be ideal times to use the Spiral Up Lite app. But in order to be responsive to one's need to use the app requires regular use of it, so that thinking of the app becomes automatic and you'll remember to use it. When you need the app the most, say while in stress level 5 (when you would really benefit from its use), you're not likely to say, "hmm, seems like a good time to use the app." But, if you're regularly using it, you'll likely have your phone near you, the app widget on your opening phone screen so you'll see it and then remember to use it, and a recent history of using it (like 1-2 hours since you used it last). To me, it's so important to use the app when you need it least, so you can grow to know the app and spend more of your time in levels 1 or 2. In level 1, you're releasing feel good hormones (serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin). The longer you can stay in level 1 and the more you experience the presence of these hormones, the more (at least this has been my personal experience) you prefer feeling that way. But, it takes work. You've gotta use the app and do it often, at least five times per day.
- Question continued: Or [will] regular exercise in daily life repeatedly help with the rewiring?
- Answer: Exercising will not rewire the brain. Period. Exercising often, because it can make people feel good, becomes what we call an "external solution." People can get addicted to external solutions in the same way they become addicted to behaviors such as eating, gambling, shopping, fighting, etc. Though people may feel some relief by engaging in external solutions, such relief is short lived, comes with consequences, AND do not rewire brain circuits. Instead, these behaviors become re-enforced and repetitive.
- Question continued: Would the mental health training help with both tobacco cessation AND prevention?
- Answer: Absolutely! For more information, please reach out to Cassidy at cassidy@ebt.net or visit ebtconnect.net

3. Practical Application of Cessation Tools & Programs

- Question: Curious about the naming of the app. Please say more about how the name was determined. Thanks.
- Answer: I was not involved with the name selection, but I must say it sounds intuitive to me. I've grown up hearing things like, "so-and-so is out of control and spiraling down." I see the Spiral Up Lite app as a tool that helps one to gain control and spiral up, as in moving from stress levels 3, 4, and 5, which are controlled by the lower anatomical areas of the brain, to

moving up ("spiraling up") to level 1 in the Neocortex, which is a higher anatomical area of the brain. The difference between "Spiral Up Lite" and the "Spiral Up" apps is that the "Lite" offers the basic Emotional Brain Training tools and is free, whereas the other app requires one to have a paid subscription and accompanies structured participation in Emotional Brain Training sessions.

- Question: I apologize, Dr. Yerger, as you may have addressed this. Does the Spiral Up Lite app only work if someone is also seeing a therapist or coach who is trained in EBT?
- Answer: The Spiral Up Lite app can be a great tool for a therapist or coach to share with their clients to aid in their recovery but the app itself can be used by the individual themselves without a trained EBT therapist.
- Question: PLEASE let me know how to connect with EBT trainings!! I am VERY excited about this!
- Answer: For more information, please reach out to Cassidy at cassidy@ebt.net or visit ebtconnect.net