

Featured Nurse Leader

Josie Howard-Ruben, RN, MS, AOCN, CHPN

Making systems change at Advocate Health Care in northern Illinois.

Josie Howard-Ruben, RN, MS, AOCN, CHPN, is taking charge on issues of tobacco control in her hospital system. Motivated by taking care of lung cancer patients during a twenty-year nursing career, she wants to see nurses get more involved in helping patients to quit smoking. Thinking back to her days treating patients afflicted by tobacco-related diseases, Josie noted that “there was not much guidance on tobacco control for nurses at the time and I felt uncomfortable addressing cessation issues with these very ill patients or their families.” She felt the imperative to do more, and in the past few years has undertaken some new initiatives.



In her role as a clinical development specialist at Advocate Health Care, an eight-hospital system based in the greater Chicago area, she has developed a continuing education training module on tobacco cessation counseling for the nurses in the health care system. She is also conducting a study to test the efficacy of various delivery modes for her training module (classroom versus web), along with several other co-investigator advanced practice nurses (Jean Mau, MSN, APRN, BC; Uta Tichawa, RN, MSN; and, Carrie May, MS, APN/CNP). Josie presented this work, as part of a Tobacco Free Nurses panel, at the National Conference on Tobacco or Health, held in May in Chicago. In addition, Josie has worked with Advocate Health Care to provide links on their intranet to resources like the Tobacco Free Nurses website (www.tobaccofreenurses.org), which nurses and patients can use in tobacco cessation.

Right now, most of her activities center on nurses but she hopes to engage other members of the health care team in tobacco cessation. Her aim is to “impact how people perceive their role in tobacco cessation because we all have a role to play. Even the volunteers at the hospital entrance have a role to play in smoking cessation. They are the ones that smokers ask where smoking is allowed. Yet, no one thinks to involve them in smoking cessation initiatives.” Her long-term plans include offering computer-based training about the importance of tobacco cessation to all hospital employees. She believes in providing hospital employees who smoke with smoking cessation options as many hospitals are becoming smoke-free.

She advises nurses to step up to the plate on tobacco control and plans to continue educating nurses about tobacco cessation. Ms. Howard-Ruben believes that, “nurses have a legitimate role to play in tobacco cessation but they don’t always know how to intervene. Unfortunately, lack of training on tobacco cessation leaves nurses without the tools they need to make an impact on tobacco cessation.” She wants nurses to understand that helping patients to quit smoking can have a significant economic impact since it is the single most important step to reducing healthcare costs in the United States.

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