

Featured Nurse Leader

Terri Roberts, J.D., R.N.

Advocating for change

Terri Roberts, J.D., R.N. brings passion and a wealth of experience in public policy and advocacy to her work. With degrees in both Nursing and Law, she is in an ideal position to bring about tobacco control policy change. Currently, she is the executive director of the Kansas State Nurses Association, where she represents professional nurses within her state and is responsible for implementing the programs and standards developed by KSNA. Before assuming the position of KSNA Executive Director in 1985, Terri worked for the special committee on aging and later as a legislative intern for Senator Bob Dole on Capitol Hill. The bulk of her tobacco control work started about seven years ago when she joined the Tobacco Free Kansas Coalition as part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Smokeless State Initiative. She served as policy chair for the coalition for four years and was president of the coalition when it played a key role in the passage of a cigarette excise tax increase in Kansas. She has been part of key regulatory achievements in tobacco control in the state of Kansas; from toughening of youth access laws (e.g. elimination of cigarette vending machines from public areas and harsher penalty for illegal sale to minors) to getting the Medicaid division to fund cessation for pregnant women. She also took the lead in successfully fighting a state preemption efforts related to smokefree laws in Kansas. Preemption is a battle that the tobacco industry is waging at the state level that prohibits local governmental authorities from making stronger smokefree ordinances than what exists at the state level.



As a former cardiovascular nurse, Terri Roberts understands that nurses face competing priorities. She asserts, however, that nurses have an integral role to play in tobacco control because “nurses bring their credibility to the plate and patients trust them.” She further stresses that; “there is need for a critical mass of nurses to become involved in tobacco control.” She believes that nurses can be effective at reducing cigarette consumption and encouraging cessation by playing a role in reinforcing health effects of tobacco usage to the public. As an example she points out that, “we (nurses) are still not implementing the 5 A's (Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, Arrange). We need to ensure that a critical mass of nurses routinely implement the 5 A's, and conduct best practices for tobacco cessation.” She supports efforts to educate nurses about how to provide smoking cessation counseling but sees a gap in the process. According to her, “directors of nursing and other people in hospital management can mandate that their nurses be competent in the implementation of the five A's” but these executives are often not a target of efforts to educate nurses about tobacco control. Consequently, she is embarking on projects to put tobacco control on the radar screen for nurse executives. She attended a meeting of the Kansas state nurse executives and presented on the issue of smoking cessation. She is also alerting nurse executives to the existence of the AHRQ pocket guide for nurses.

Despite her remarkable achievements, Terri Roberts still has her eyes set on further tobacco control goals. She is working to increase the number of smoke-free communities in Kansas. She has also embarked on a project to conduct regional education workshops for maternal and child health nurses in Kansas on the issue of smoking cessation. Although she is an example of what a single nurse can achieve in tobacco control, she stresses that one “cannot emphasize enough the power of a critical mass of nurses.” Tobacco Free Nurses agrees, if every nurse helped one person to quit each year the number of quitters in the U.S. would triple to 3 1/2 million!

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