European Network of Quitlines Scientific Report

Quitline UK

Quit, UK is the lead agency of the European Network of Quitlines, providing Quitline (a telephone smoking cessation helpline) for smokers. Quitlines offer the following advantages:

♦ Easy access to service
♦ Cost effective
♦ Confidential (an anonymous service is provided if required)

The Quitline in the United Kingdom was established in 1988 and has taken 2 million calls to date. A study on the UK Quitline, published in the journal “Tobacco Control” by Lesley Owen (June 2000), reported that “the telephone helpline offers an intervention with potential for widespread use which is also easily accessible”. The study showed that “at one year 22% of smokers reported that they had stopped smoking”. The adjusted quit rate of this figure was 15%. European Quitline services received a total of 550,000 calls between 1999 & 2000.

Initial ideas for the Network

Visits to the UK Quitline from Germany, Spain and Ireland demonstrated the strength of sharing knowledge. QUIT UK helped establish new Quitlines in these countries and we made improvements to our own service, as a result of these visits. The idea to create a European Network of Quitlines developed as a consequence of these initial visits.

Objectives of the Network

The European Network of Quitlines was established with the following objectives:

♦ To support smoking cessation efforts and reduce smoking rates throughout Europe
♦ To involve all member states in the European Network of Quitlines
♦ To share expertise/experience of running quitlines
♦ To raise the standards of such services to help more smokers in Europe in their cessation efforts
♦ To assist those wishing to establish new quitlines in member states
♦ To examine the range of practice and evidence of success in different states and disseminate this information
Original partners in the Network

♦ UK
♦ Germany
♦ Ireland
♦ Sweden
♦ The Netherlands
♦ Spain

One measure of success in the Network has been the extent to which it has attracted new participants. In addition to the original six partners, the following member states will become partners in Year 2 of the project:

♦ France
♦ Denmark
♦ Italy
♦ Norway (ES country)

In addition to EC member states, the following non-member states are interested in the project:

♦ Poland
♦ Switzerland

Progress made in Year 1

Steering Groups

The first meeting of the Steering Group of the European Network of Quitlines took place in Dublin, Ireland on 6th and 7th October 2000 (please see enclosed minutes, appendix 1). In addition to the original six partners, representatives from France, Norway & Poland attended the meeting. The meeting reviewed a report of current activities from each Quitline and reviewed the objectives of the Network. The partners discussed and agreed a timetable of future activities. We considered how best to provide support for those wishing to establish Quitlines where no services existed, and allocated responsibilities for this work amongst the partners. In addition, items for the agenda for the conference in Barcelona were considered. An initiative to gather data and research on Quitlines was agreed.

The second meeting of the Steering Group was held in Heidelberg, Germany from Friday 18th May and Saturday 19th May (please see enclosed minutes, appendix 2). Partners from Denmark and Switzerland also attended, in addition to those in attendance at Dublin. During this meeting we focused on the evidence base for Quitlines and provided an update on data gathered from each Quitline, as agreed in Dublin. We also developed our agenda for the Barcelona conference, and allocated sessions.
Barcelona Conference

Our Barcelona conference took place between 6th & 8th September 2001. All member states (apart from Austria) were represented at our conference. We also invited two leading speakers in the field from outside Europe; Shu-Hong Zhu from California & Pat Kee from Australia who shared their experience with European colleagues. Delegates from Poland, Switzerland, Israel, Canada and New Zealand also attended. (See Appendix 3 – Dossier from the conference).

Sessions took place on the following aspects of running a Quitline:

♦ Evidence Base

Establishing the evidence base for Quitlines is a complex matters due to the difficulties of running randomized controlled trials with Quitlines. In thirteen trials of proactive telephone counselling (Lichtenstein et al.1996) “proactive counselling calls were shown to have consistent beneficial effects”. The Smoking Cessation Guidelines for Health Professionals (R West, A McNeill, M Raw, Thorax, Issue 55, 2000) also states that: “Reactive telephone counselling may be effective as an aid to smoking cessation”.

The European Network will carry out randomized controlled trials in Years 2 & 3, to back up existing research on the effectiveness of Quitlines.

♦ Training Quitline staff

♦ How to use technology in running a Quitline

Some Quitlines are highly technical in order to improve the level of service for their clients. For example, in The Netherlands an interactive voice response system allows callers to locate their nearest smoking cessation clinic and order literature. In Denmark callers can receive counselling via the internet. The Network has also set up an exclusive website for all partners.

♦ How to set up a new service

♦ Marketing Quitlines

Quitlines use the following media to advertise their services: television, radio, newspapers & magazines, internet & mailouts targeted towards health professionals & GP’s.

♦ Pro-active Quitlines

More services are providing proactive callback services for their clients.
♦ **Targeting Key Groups with Quitlines**

Quitlines have been found to be particularly effective in targeting particular groups of smokers. For example, in the UK we provide specialist telephone counselling helplines for pregnant women, ethnic minority smokers and fathers. In Sweden the Quitline targets ethnic minority smokers and the service in The Netherlands targets smokers on a low income.

**Assisting New Services**

The Network also supports new services by providing advice on the following:

♦ Setting up a service
♦ Training staff
♦ Technology
♦ Marketing strategy
♦ Obtaining funding
♦ Morale boost

In May 2001, a support visit to Italy took place. We visited the Quitline run by the “Lega Italiani per la lotta contro I tumori”. In 2002 we also plan a support visit to Portugal.

**Conclusion**

We are pleased that we have met our objectives in the following ways:

♦ We have involved more member states in the Network. Representatives from all member states (apart from Austria) attended our conference.
♦ We have raised the standard of services by sharing best practice, to help more smokers in Europe in their cessation efforts.
♦ We have shared expertise/experience through both Steering Groups & our conference.
♦ We assisted in establishing new services in Portugal, Finland & Belgium, by inviting them to our conference, & offering support. We also provided a morale boost for services which were experiencing difficulties.
♦ We have examined the range of practice of Quitlines by gathering information on European services, which will be used in our Guide to Best Practice.
**Plans for Year 2**

The Network also plans to provide two seminar groups & two training sessions which will cover the following topics:

- Internet counselling
- Plenary research that the Network will carry out
- Counselling protocols
- Stall on advertising/marketing
- Study groups & updates at all meetings to develop a Guide to Best Practice
- A detailed look at how the Dutch & Swedish services work
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