

Tobacco Prevention in Germany – A Success Story with Many Challenges Still Ahead

Smoking is “out”, non-smoking is “in” – particularly among youth: The number of young people trying cigarettes or becoming regular smokers is declining. In the past decade, the smoker’s rate among youth has dropped from 28 percent to less than 12 percent. The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) has brought forward this success in health protection. The WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control, based at DKFZ, has contributed effective measures for reducing tobacco use to the public debate. In collaboration with other national and international partners it supports decision-makers in implementing such measures.

“Smoking is one of the major avoidable risk factors for the development of cancer. About 40% of all cancer types would be preventable by following a healthy lifestyle,” says Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Otmar D. Wiestler, Chairman of the Management Board and Scientific Director of the German Cancer Research Center. Therefore, DKFZ established a Cancer Prevention Unit in the late 1990s. Its mission is to make a noticeable contribution to reducing tobacco use in Germany. The World Health Organization (WHO) designated the unit as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control in 2002.

“Cancer prevention is possible,” says Dr. Martina Pötschke-Langer, head of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control. With her commitment to curbing tobacco use, she took up the fight against a major risk factor of cancer development. The WHO Collaborating Centre’s intensive communication with media and decision-makers has led to a fundamental change in public opinion about smoking and secondhand smoke over the past ten years. In 2005, the publication “Passivrauchen – ein unterschätztes Gesundheitsrisiko” (Secondhand smoke – an underestimated health hazard) ignited a public debate about health hazards from secondhand smoke and laid the foundation for the introduction of non-smoker protection legislation in 2007. Along with repeated tobacco tax increases, restrictions in tobacco advertising and a variety of other measures advocated by DKFZ, this has led to a change in attitude. Today, public smoking is no longer accepted and is therefore hardly present any more. The resulting significant decrease in tobacco use, particularly among youth, substantially contributes to public health.

“In spite of these achievements, big challenges are still ahead,” Martina Pötschke-Langer admits. “We still urgently call for comprehensive non-smoker protection without any exceptions in the catering industry. In accordance with the WHO, we also fight for a strict advertising ban and better product regulation.”

On the occasion of its tenth anniversary, the WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control has issued a publication entitled “Ten Years of WHO Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control at the German Cancer Research Center – Achievements and Prospects”, which will be available in English early next year.

The publication will be available for download at www.tabakkontrolle.de or as a printed booklet at the Division of Press and Public Relations of DKFZ.

The German Cancer Research Center (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum, DKFZ) with its more than 2,500 employees is the largest biomedical research institute in Germany. At DKFZ, more than 1,000 scientists investigate how cancer develops, identify cancer risk factors and endeavor to find new strategies to prevent people from getting cancer. They develop novel approaches to make tumor diagnosis more precise and treatment of cancer patients more successful. Jointly with Heidelberg University Hospital, DKFZ has established the

National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg where promising approaches from cancer research are translated into the clinic. The staff of the Cancer Information Service (KID) offers information about the widespread disease of cancer for patients, their families, and the general public. The center is a member of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centers. Ninety percent of its funding comes from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the remaining ten percent from the State of Baden-Württemberg.

Dr. Stefanie Seltmann
Head of Press and Public Relations
German Cancer Research Center
Im Neuenheimer Feld 280
D-69120 Heidelberg
T: +49 6221 42 2854
F: +49 6221 42 2968