Abstract

Despite the accumulation of scientific evidence confirming the health consequences of smoking and the new paradigm of smoking as a disease where nicotine is the drug that modifies the functional and morphological characteristics of the brain in dependent smokers, tobacco smoking continues as an important public health problem in many Latin American countries. In contrast with big advances in the tobacco control area, as an example the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control signed by 168 countries, the role of health professional in the fight against tobacco is still less than ideal. In many Latin American schools of medicine, deficiencies in medical education has led to insecure physicians when they have to motivate their patients to stop smoking or to prevent young people to begin tobacco consumption. If each general practitioner or specialist during their daily medical assistance could talk to their smoker patients about the big benefits of stop smoking and support them to get free of tobacco, we would be winning a battle against smoking. Also if we could achieve generations of young non smoking doctors, who could be a real example for patients, this could also impact the prevalence of smokers. In this article we analyze the neurobiological bases of nicotine addiction, which we think are missing in the medical curriculum and could help doctors to understand tobacco smoking as a disease rather than a risk factor, and discuss the main reasons supporting an urgent change in the medical approach of tobacco cessation in Latin America as well as the need to actualize the medical curriculum in order to give physicians the skills needed to intervene successfully with their smoker patients and to be themselves non smokers.

Keywords

Tobacco smoking, cessation, prevention, medical education, schools of medicine, Latin America, currículo.