

Pictorial warnings on cigarette packets affect only new smokers

Oncologists say pictures on cigarette packs help new smokers quit; patients often visit doctors asking them if there are chances of contracting diseases portrayed on pack

19th July 2018



Image for representational purpose only.

By Express News Service

BENGALURU: The Supreme Court refused to stay a central government order that requires 85 per cent of a cigarette packet to be covered with pictorial and text warnings about the harmful effects of smoking, on Monday. With the order set to now be brought into effect in September, doctors in the city say that the measure will mostly dissuade those who have been newly initiated into smoking. For nicotine addicts, who have been puffing away for years, the new measure will hardly have any effect, they say. Dr Poonam Patil, oncologist at Manipal Hospital, says, “Patients have come to me after looking at nasty pictures or diagrams on cigarettes packets to inquire if there is a possibility of contracting such diseases.

We counsel them that there is definitely a chance that they will and we advise them that the earlier they leave, the better.” She highlights that she has also come across patients who just don’t care. “For those who are neck deep into smoking, the feeling is one of defiance. Many of them, in fact, get offended when we ask them about their history of smoking. They say they have already got the disease, so there is no point thinking about it,” she adds.

Dr Radhekrishna, oncologist at HCG, is of the opinion that even though the pictorial warning ward off only first time and new smokers, it is a step in the right direction. “Around 10 per cent of the world’s population engage in smoking. Of these, new initiators may be teenagers or children. If such pictorial warnings are able to ward off this group at the very beginning,

then it would be useful. More the warning in graphics, more the chances of discouraging new smokers to quit immediately,” he says.

There have been several studies that talk about the effectiveness of pictorial warnings to discourage people to stop smoking. The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2016-17 that was released by the Union Health Ministry, for example, talks about the positive effects of such warnings. According to the study, as many as 62 per cent of cigarette smokers, 54 per cent of bidi smokers and 46 per cent of smokeless tobacco users said they thought about quitting due to such measures.

Lokesh N smokes around two to three cigarettes per day. He says, “When you buy a pack of cigarettes, such pictures definitely make you think about what you are doing to yourself. It is scary and does make you think about quitting. I have thought about quitting several times myself. Hopefully, I will soon.”

Source: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/2018/jul/19/pictorial-warnings-on-cigarette-packets-affect-only-new-smokers-1845190.html>