What is WATI and Why Does It Matter to Quitlines?

Web-Assisted Tobacco Interventions (WATI), interventions designed specifically for tobacco prevention and cessation, can easily be found on the Internet (for example, www.quitnet.com). In addition, an increasing number of tobacco cessation service providers are dedicating time and resources to building their Web-based and technology-related services. This is no surprise, and given the Internet's reach and availability, even small changes attributed to a Web-based intervention can translate into a large population health effect. For this reason, and the growing popularity and cost-effectiveness of eHealth in general, the quitline community is taking notice of WATI.

As of July 2007 six of 10 Canadian quitlines and 32 of 51 U.S. quitlines offered some form of Web-based cessation services. These services may include:

- Information about cessation and the services of the quitline
- Self-directed Web-based interventions to help tobacco users quit
- Automated email messages
- Chat rooms
- Interactive counseling and/or email messages to cessation specialists/counselors
- Events calendars
- Interactive maps to access information on regional tobacco cessation services

Quitlines may also offer Web-based services for health professionals to support their work in helping their patients quit:

- Information and message boards for health professionals
- Allowing health professionals to download smoking cessation materials and presentations
- E-Referral Systems (health professionals can assist individuals to sign up for quitline services)
- Monthly newsletters sent to health professionals and community partners
- Providing updates on tobacco cessation topics and regional programs/events

While the evidence base for WATI is growing, there are still challenges in applying standard research models to Web-based cessation programs. Given the Internet's reach and availability, even small changes attributed to a Web-based intervention can translate into a large population health effect. At this time, most states and provinces that offer WATI do so as an adjunct service to its quitline. However, as WATI gains a stronger evidence, which is applied in the field, we may see a shift in resources and in focus.
Web-Assisted Tobacco Interventions (WATI): The Future of Tobacco Cessation?

**WATI: An Ancillary Service of Quitlines**

Many quitline service providers are working to determine how best to link WATI with their existing intervention methods. Using email to schedule proactive quitline follow-up calls, text messaging to offer additional support on a client’s quit date and using chat rooms for support among other quitline clients trying to quit are three ways that quitlines are linking better with emerging technology.

Free & Clear, Inc., a long-time provider of quitline services, has recently developed a program called *Click to Call*. *Click to Call* is a button that resides on a Web site that initiates a telephone call into a quitline. *Click to Call* can help promote a quitline by providing an easy way for participants to connect via phone as well as increase program efficacy by making it easy for participants to contact their Quit Coach™ for any reason – whether they’re dealing with a craving, have a question about medication or just want to talk about their quit. It becomes an instant link between the participant and the Quit Coach. Calls initiated by *Click to Call* are handled just like an inbound phone call to a quitline.

*For more information about Free & Clear’s experience with *Click to Call* please contact Mary Kokstis at mary.kokstis@freeclear.com.*

**WATI: A Tool to Promote Quitlines**

Over time, the State of New Jersey has learned advertising the state quitline number on the Internet garners a tremendous result.

“We have a huge number of quitline callers who are coming to us via the online advertising... not to mention we have saved over one million in advertising dollars using this approach.”

While New Jersey advertises its telephone-based service on the Internet, it does not advertise the Web-based service. Google lists QuitNet (New Jersey’s WATI provider) first when someone searches for quit assistance online. This approach drives enough visitors for the quitline to reach its goals.

*For more information on New Jersey’s cessation services, please contact Ed Kazimir at edward.kazimir@doh.state.nj.us.*

**WATI: A Stand-Alone Cessation Intervention**

The Wyoming QuitNet started in 2002 after state staff learned how cost efficient it would be to offer Web-based interventions to this frontier state’s population, as opposed to offering a more expensive quitline service. In fact, unlike most states, the Wyoming quitline was not operational until nearly a year after their Web-based intervention services began. While admittedly there have been some challenges in establishing quit rates for their QuitNet users, Wyoming has been pleased with the numbers of registrants, the satisfaction of clients and the other types of data and trends that are reported to them frequently.

*For more information about Wyoming QuitNet, please contact George Pitt at gpitt@state.wy.us.*

The www.trytostop.org Web site is a tri-state resource center that offers people three different ways to quit, including via the Web. Massachusetts put substantial funding into developing this site and as funding became scarce, was unable to continue to enhance the site as expected. If a state is considering building its own Web site in order to deliver WATI, it must consider the significant cost to build, maintain and enhance it.

Three years ago Massachusetts developed www.quitworks.org. This is a Web site for health care providers that supports efforts to help their patients quit and provides online linkage to the quitline fax referral program. It is important to remember that there are two avenues for Web-based assistance – directly to the tobacco user or directly to health care providers.

*For more information about Massachusetts Try To Stop Resource Center or the QuitWorks program, please contact Donna Warner at Donna.Warner@state.ma.us.*
WATI: Lessons in Research

American Cancer Society’s (ACS) QUITLINK study randomized 6,451 adult smokers into one of six sites (five interactive Web sites and one static site with downloadable self-help booklets). Study participants were similar to ACS clients requesting phone support in gender, age, previous quit attempts and smoking rate, however, were different in that they were more educated, more likely to be Caucasian and less likely to report a symptom of depression at intake.

With follow up completed at four months and a 54% response rate, there was no significant overall difference in cessation rates among participants assigned to the interactive or static sites. However, utilization rates did differ significantly among the five interactive sites. Clients randomized to the two sites with higher utilization rates had significantly higher cessation rates than those randomized to the three sites with lower utilization rates. There are plans to conduct 7- and 13-month follow up in order to be able to learn more about what kinds of tobacco users are most successful and with what types of Web-based support.

For more information at the QUITLINK study, please contact Vance Rabius, PhD. at Vance.Rabius@cancer.org.

Considerations for Research and Practice

While the evidence base for WATI is growing, there are still challenges in applying standard research models to Web-based cessation programs. For example, how do we conduct randomized controlled trials on the Internet? In addition, issues related to subject recruitment, service evaluation and secured data must also be addressed.

What are the unique cultural and ethical considerations for WATI research and evaluation?

The “IT” issues of Web design, special features, technological ability and “usability” must be examined in relation to the delivery and evaluation of WATI.

What kinds of tobacco users does WATI attract? Essentially, who is served best by these interventions? Conversely, who is not served well?

“We have had over 300,000 unique visitors to our site over five years and over 46,000 have registered. The important question is what happened to those who didn’t register for services and why didn’t they.”

Summary

At this time, most states and provinces that offer WATI do so as an adjunct service to its quitline or as a promotion strategy. However, as WATI gains stronger evidence, which is applied in the field, we may see a shift in resources and in focus. Understanding the importance of providing tobacco users variety in treatment options, we must also remember that an integrated approach to statewide cessation services is critical. The best way to do so remains a question for us all to bear in mind.
Learn More

Select Research Articles


- Graham, Amanda L. PhD; Cobb, Nathan K. MD; Raymond, Linda MS; Sill, Stewart MS; Young, Joyce MD (2007). Effectiveness of an Internet-Based Worksite Smoking Cessation Intervention at 12 Months. *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 49(8):821-828.


Other Resources of Interest

The Pew Internet and American Life Project produces reports that explore the impact of the Internet on families, communities, work and home, daily life, education, health care and civic and political life. The report accessed at the link below and written by Susannah Fox, describes the demographics and other information related to people who use the Internet to find health information and resources, including smoking cessation (about six to seven percent of online health seekers have searched for quit smoking help online).

http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/156/report_display.asp

www.naquitline.org

About the North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC)

NAQC is a nonprofit organization that strives to promote evidence based quitline services across diverse communities in North America. By bringing quitline partners together, including state and provincial quitline administrators, quitline service providers, researchers and national organizations in the United States, Canada and Mexico, NAQC helps facilitate shared learning and encourages a better understanding of quitline operations, promotions and effectiveness to improve quitline services.

This Fact Sheet is a publication of the North American Quitline Consortium (NAQC). The development of the NAQC Fact Sheet series is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and American Cancer Society.