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Feb. 29 2008

New Program Helps Expectant Mothers Kick the Habit

MARATHON, FL Keys -- When expectant mothers smoke, they are smoking not just for themselves, but their developing babies too. That's not healthy for either mother or child. A new program is underway to help pregnant women who smoke kick the tobacco habit -- the Quit Smoking Now program, sponsored by the Florida Keys Area Health Education Center (FKAHEC).

The program is free and uses counseling and therapies specifically designed to help pregnant women from across the Keys quit smoking safely and quickly.

“We perform an in depth assessment of every mother-to-be who joins the program to determine the best avenues to help her become tobacco free,” said Michael Cunningham,

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Quit Smoking

CEO of FKAHEC. “Studies have shown that 70 percent of current smokers, including expectant mothers, would like to quit. With our specialized program, we give expectant mothers all the tools and help they need to kick the habit.”

According to Physician Assistant Joyce Wagner, a certified tobacco cessation counselor with FKAHEC, many women smokers have tried to quit more than once. “But with a baby coming, some women realize that it is time to make a serious effort to quit,” said Wagner. “When women smoke during pregnancy, the likelihood of serious health problems for their babies increases substantially. Babies are more likely to be born too soon or too small, experience crib death (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome—SIDS) catch colds easily, and have lung and ear infections.”

In the program’s initial assessment phase, the expectant mother is asked about her medical history, smoking habits, treatment preferences, triggers to smoking, and past quit attempts – what worked, what didn’t work. These questions help determine level of addiction to nicotine and help smokers become more aware of how and why they smoke.

“By getting a complete picture of a pregnant smoker, we can then create a customized plan for success” said Wagner. “Our Quit Smoking Now assessment takes the confusion out of the many therapies and drugs available today, and, particularly for expectant mothers, how to safely and properly use each for the most benefit.”

Expectant mothers who complete the program find that good things happen soon after quitting: more nutrition gets to the unborn baby, chances for a healthy baby and healthy childhood increase. Mothers benefit as well from less stress and more energy and, over time, reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases associated with smoking.

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Quit Smoking

Financial assistance for medications and therapies is available for expectant mothers who qualify. Discounts on some therapies, such as hypnosis and acupuncture, are available for everyone, and everyone can qualify for at least one month's free supply of nicotine patches or gum through the state of Florida's Smoking Quitline.

The program features an easy-to-remember website (www.keystoquitsmoking.com) where women can get additional information or sign up for the program. They can also call 743-7111 to enroll in the program.

Most assessment and counseling sessions are held at these locations:

Tavernier – The Good Health Clinic, 91555 Overseas Hwy

Marathon – 5800 Overseas Hwy., Suite #38, Gulfside Village Shopping Center

Key West – de Poo Building, Kennedy Drive, First Floor

Big Pine Key – Total Wellness Center, Big Pine Key Shopping Center, Key Deer Blvd.

The Florida Keys AHEC, affiliated with the University of Miami Miller Medical School, promotes health and wellness through education, health assessments, and professional development using partnerships to provide a healthier, better educated community.