

An easier way to clear the air

Whilst in Australia each year we are commemorating ANZAC Day, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is raising awareness of a disease that affects about 40% of the world's population and kills more than one million people annually.

April 25 is World Malaria Day.

Malaria was once much more widespread, but it was successfully eliminated from many countries with temperate climates during the mid 20th century. With long term warmer weather apparently creeping southwards from the equator and insects becoming frequent flyers by hitching a ride on international airlines, countries like Australia might again become high risk areas.

Malaria is a life threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes; specifically the female of the Anopheles family of mosquitoes. Currently it affects mainly people living in the poorer countries. Ninety percent of deaths due to malaria occur in Africa south of the Sahara, mostly among young children. Malaria kills an African child every 30 seconds.

Before the real cause of malaria was discovered in the 1880s, the disease was thought to emanate from the dank smell and dampness of field marshes – hence the name: mal aria or “bad air”.

So, bad air has nothing to do with malaria, but bad air that we personally produce results in many more deaths. It's the cigarette smoke filled air we inhale that causes so much damage. In fact tobacco smoking is the single greatest cause of preventable disease in the world. Even passive smoking – inhaling someone else's second hand smoke has been proven to be a problem.

There would hardly be a man, woman or even child in Australia who doesn't know about the dangers of smoking. So why would anyone still be a smoker?

There are probably many reasons why people begin to smoke – peer pressure is a particularly relevant factor in young women – and the reality is, once you start smoking it's mighty hard to stop. Nearly two thirds of smokers would like to stop smoking, but fewer than 1 in 20 people who try to quit will actually remain non-smokers after three months.

The problem, therefore, is not just beginning the quit process, but staying the distance as a non-smoker. If you are one of those thousands of Australians who want to stop smoking; if you're very willing, pretty much ready and just wanting to be enabled to quit for good, then there are some new strategies which might make your job a whole lot easier.

Recent research, published in the *British Medical Journal*, has shown the benefits of a gradual reduction in smoking before quitting for good. This “cut down then quit” method may suit some smokers who find it hard to stay a non-smoker. The combination of patches and gum together may be what some smokers need to prevent the cravings; and a new mini lozenge is now available with a quicker release of nicotine.

As well, it is now recognised that nicotine replacement therapy can be a useful tool for just about everybody to assist with smoking cessation; that is everybody regardless of age, sex or medical history. We know that using nicotine replacement therapy to quit is always safer than continuing to smoke.

There are many myths and misconceptions about the effects of nicotine and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). Make sure you get the facts and the right advice on what products will suit you best. Ask for the fact cards on *Smoking* and *Staying a Non-smoker* from one of the pharmacies around Australia providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information. Phone 1300 369 772 or check out the website at www.psa.org.au for the nearest location. May 31 each year is designated by WHO as World No Tobacco Day. Maybe it's a good time to consider quitting for good and clearing your personal air space.