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Tobacco prevention gets wired

A Eugene research institute is using a computer game to help users quit chewing

By Felicity Ayles
Oregon Daily Emerald

As the old song goes, "It's one, two, three strikes you're out ..."

The Oregon Research Institute in Eugene is testing a baseball-themed program to help people addicted to chewing tobacco, and they say nobody can strike out in this game if they really want to win.

The program has a baseball motif that is designed to help nicotine addicts reach their goals of quitting, and each base has a different meaning, ORI spokesman John Fisher said.

First base is the readiness for quitting, second base is setting a quit date, third base is quitting and fourth base is staying off tobacco, he said.

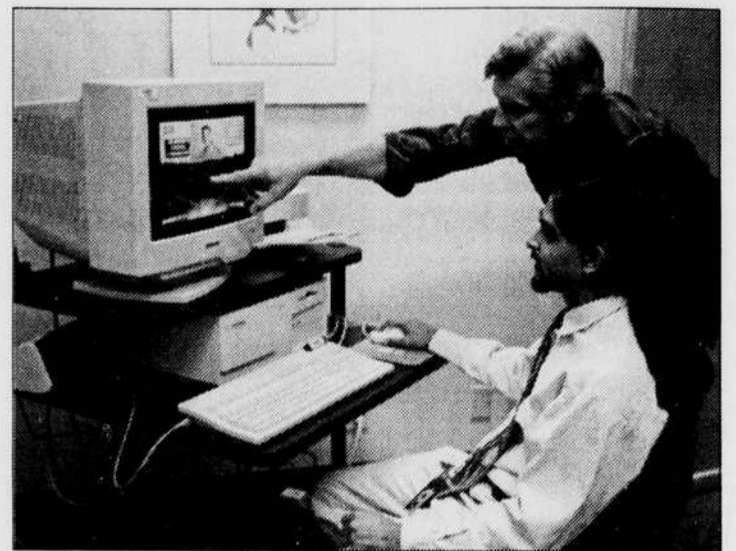
ORI, in conjunction with Inter-Vision, a Eugene computer program company, has developed a computer-based interactive program to aid people trying to quit chewing tobacco, and they want people to try it — free of charge.

More than 50 percent of people who have tried the program were able to quit and remain tobacco-free, said Dr. Herbert Severson, scientific investigator for the project.

The program largely targets males, Severson said, because they use chewing tobacco more than females. According to Fisher, 98 percent of people who chew tobacco are males.

Fisher said 9 percent of Oregon males older than 18 use chewing tobacco, but he said ORI believes that number is "significantly higher on campus."

Severson said 15 to 20 percent of men on campus have used chewing tobacco in the last 30



Laura Goss/Emerald

John Fisher and Naseem Choudhury demonstrate ORI's tobacco prevention program.

days and 12 to 15 percent use it more regularly.

The program begins by asking users questions about how they want to quit, and the choices they will make by quitting, Severson said. At the end of the program, the computer gives a printout that serves as the "game plan," he said.

People who use the program can take the printout home so they only have to do the program once, he said.

The program was previously tested with a small group of people and this is the confirmatory stage, Fisher said.

"Accessibility is the key factor of the program," said Fisher, adding that it satisfies two things.

The program allows people to quit on their own time instead of having to go to counseling sessions or group therapy. And the interactive component allows users to create a "game plan" without seeing a physician, he said.

And although the program is specifically designed for chewing

tobacco, it also works with cigarettes, Fisher said.

Severson is responsible for the project's scientific integrity. He has been working in tobacco research for 20 years and has written a book to help people quit, but he said a computer game is a lot more fun.

Severson said his idea behind the project was to use the book and turn it into an interactive program. Eventually, Severson hopes to put the program on CD-ROM so people can use it in their homes.

There are also services offered on campus to help students who are addicted to tobacco.

The University Student Health Center does not have statistics on tobacco, but it offers smoking cessation workshops and suggests students take advantage of these while they are still at the University, health educator Joanne Frank said.

Those interesting in trying the program can contact ORI, located at 1715 Franklin Blvd., by calling 1-800-266-7009.

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