Press Release

INFECTION ASSOCIATION (HQS.)
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Mutually Affiliated with the British & Nepal Medical Associations
I.M.A. House, Indraprastha Marg, New Delhi-110 002
Telephones: +91-11-2337 0009, 2337 0250, 2337 8680, 2337 0473, 2337 0492, 2337 8424
Fax: +91-11-23379470, 23370375, 23379178
Website: www.ima-india.org; Email: hsg@ima-india.org

Prolonged consumption of tobacco can make a person blind

AMD is a major outcome of tobacco consumption and an avoidable risk factor

New Delhi, 14 September, 2017: A recent study has indicated that prolonged consumption of tobacco can lead to blindness. Exposure to tobacco over a period of 5 to 10 years tends to affect the optic nerve leading to loss of vision.[1] As per the IMA, people are only aware of heart disease, cancer, etc. as outcomes of smoking and chewing tobacco. However, the fact that it can also lead to blindness in the long run is definitely another strong reason to quit this deadly habit for good.

Smoking also increases the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is a leading cause of vision loss among people age 50 and older. It damage the macula, a small spot near the center of the retina and the part of the eye needed for sharp, central vision, which lets us see objects that are straight ahead in activities such as reading, sewing and driving.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, “Cigarette smoke contains a mixture of many harmful chemicals. These are absorbed through the lungs and some of them are oxidants, which can damage the retina when they travel through the bloodstream. Those who smoke are twice as likely to develop AMD as nonsmokers.[2] Dry AMD is the most common type of AMD. In this condition, fatty deposits form under the light-sensing cells in the back of the eye (retina). Vision loss in dry AMD usually worsens gradually. In wet AMD, tiny blood vessels under the retina leak or break open. This leads to vision changes and causes scar tissue to form. Wet AMD is less common, but harms vision more quickly. Smoking reduces the macular pigment density in the fovea (center of the macula). This pigment helps in protecting the macula from UV and blue light damage.”

Symptoms of macular degeneration include dark, blurry areas in the center of vision; and diminished or changed color perception. AMD can be detected with the help of a routine eye examination.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “It is important to get vision tested on a regular basis and follow doctor’s recommendations. But, most importantly, one should aim at quitting smoking right away. Eat a diet rich in leafy green vegetables, and protect your eyes with sunglasses that block harmful UV rays.”
The following tips may help to quit tobacco in any form and avert the risk of AMD in the long run.

- Short-acting nicotine replacement therapies such as nicotine patches, gum, lozenges, nasal sprays, or inhalers can help overcome intense cravings.
- It helps to identify the trigger situation. Knowing these will help in avoiding or getting through them without the need of using tobacco.
- Whenever there is an intense craving tobacco in any form, it is a good idea to chew on sugarless gum or hard candy, or munch raw carrots, celery, nuts or sunflower seeds instead of tobacco.
- Short bursts of physical activity such as running up and down the stairs a few times can make a tobacco craving go away.
- Practice yoga, deep breathing exercises to relieve stress.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

For further information please contact:
Sanjeev Khanna - 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmad – 9873716235
mediaimahq@gmail.com
IMA Public & Media Advocacy Cell