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Title: Education level and relapse to smoking

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Body: Background: Cigarette smoking is the most common risk factor for COPD and lung cancer. Smoking cessation programs are very important for primary prevention of lung disease, but limited data are available on their effectiveness in the long term. Aim: To investigate the factors responsible for smoking relapse over 24 months after smoking cessation. Methods: From January 2009 to December 2009, 148 smokers (72 men and 76 women, mean age \pm SD 49.9 \pm 11.8 yr) undergoing a smoking cessation program were enrolled. The protocol included motivational counselling, drug therapy (Nicotine Therapy Replacement), Fagestrom Test, exhaled CO measurement and spirometry. We assessed cigarette smoking cessation at 12 months. The smoking-abstinent at 12 months were again examined by a telephone interview at 24 months. Results: After 12 months, 47 subjects (32.7% of the original sample) were abstinent, but no difference was found between abstinent and quitters in any variable. At 24 months, 13 of the 47 subjects (27.7%) had relapsed. No differences were observed at 24 months between relapsing subjects and persistent quitters in the following baseline parameters: age, Fagestrom test score, pack-year, CO, and FEV1. However, 24 month-relapsing subjects showed a statistically lower education level compared to persistent quitters.

Education level in relapsing subjects and persistent quitters

	Relapsing subjects	Persistent quitters
Primary school	5	0
Middle school	5	4
Secondary school	3	25
Graduate education	0	5

$p < 0.0001$ by χ^2

Conclusion: About a fourth of the quitters at 12 months restart smoking at 24 months. The level of education seems to be an important factor in late, but not early, relapse to smoking. Both subjective and

environmental effects may play a role.