Smoking can be a prelude to drug addiction, health advocates warn

Leilani Junio August 8, 2017, 7:01 pm

Several health and anti-smoking advocates on Tuesday warned current and future smokers that they can fall into drug addiction with continued tobacco use.

"Tobacco products have addictive substances. Therefore, it predisposes smokers to be addicted to other substances like drugs," former health secretary Esperanza Cabral said during a press conference, noting that a third of the 4.5
Dr. Maricar Limpin, executive director of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance Philippines (FCAP) and Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), said drugs and cigarettes both enable the release of the chemical dopamine, which controls the brain’s reward and pleasure centers.

"Whatever substance abuse it may be, it has only one pathway, which is the release of dopamine to the brain," said Limpin. "That also explains why some people are hooked on sweet substances, such as sweetened beverages, because the sweet taste also gives a feeling of high from the release of dopamine from the brain. And that is the basic reason why tobacco can be a gateway to illicit drug use."

Sin Tax Coalition convener, Dr. Antonio Dans, added that epidemiological evidences show that smokers are three times more likely to use drugs compared to non-smokers.

"The real drug is tobacco. When you look at people who started on drugs, the Dangerous Drugs Board said they used tobacco first, which led them to more dangerous substances," Dr. Jaime Galvez-Tan, also a former health secretary, said, expressing his support for the Duterte Administration’s fight against illegal drugs.

New Vois Association of the Philippines (NVAP) president, Emer Rojas, agreed with the health experts, saying smokers are certainly more likely to be engaged in drug use.

"Being former smokers, we can definitely say that drug addiction is not a far-fetched possibility for those still addicted to tobacco use, considering their tendency to have the urge to get high," Rojas pointed out.

In an effort to reduce the number of smokers in the country, the Sin Tax Coalition has called on President Rodrigo Duterte and the senators to include the increase of tobacco tax in the tax reforms proposed by the government.

Dans said they are hoping that the president and the senators would consider padding the current tax rate for tobacco products instead of allowing the return of the two-tier tax system. Under the two-tier tax system, cigarette packs which sell for less than PHP11.50 will be taxed PHP32 per pack and those priced at more than PHP11.50 will be taxed PHP36.

"We urge that the taxes on tobacco be increased to 60 percent in 2018 and by 10 percent yearly thereafter," he said, adding this will result in more funds for universal health care, as provided by the Sin Tax Law, as well as a decrease in the number of smokers from 14.5 million to 13.5 million.

With less smokers, spending for the rehabilitation of drug dependents could also drop, Dans said. (PNA)