

# 'Young enough to not die from smoking'

svanderwerff

**By Rear Adm. John Fuller, commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific**

Pearl Harbor colors ceremony honors past, present, future

With the new state law beginning January 1, the State of Hawaii is helping us make it easier to quit tobacco – or, better yet, prevent our youngest shipmates from ever getting hooked.

Hawaii is making it easier for smokers to quit.

Beginning January 1, 2016 it will be against the law in this state for anyone under 21 to buy or use tobacco products, including electronic nicotine delivery devices.

Quitting tobacco is one of the best things we can do to improve fitness and readiness.

I've heard this argument by some shipmates against cracking down on tobacco: "If someone is young enough to die for their country, they should be free to be allowed to smoke."

But, turning that argument on its head: "If someone is young enough to fight for their country, they should be free from addiction to a deadly drug." Tobacco harms people's physical wellbeing, leads to illness and costs them money.

RDML Fuller Whites Uncovered

My advice to smokers: take advantage of these therapies. My advice to nonsmokers: don't start. My advice to leaders in our ranks: lead by example.

Some Sailors spend 10 dollars a day on their nicotine habit. That leads to nearly \$4,000 a year and close to \$40,000 in 10 years.

But the long-term costs are much greater. Forty percent of all deaths over the age of 45 are tobacco related. Dr. Jonathan Woodson, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, said in a memorandum last year; noting that "on average, smokers shorten their lifespan by 10 years." I wonder about their quality of life in their shortened lifespan.

From Dr. Woodson's memorandum:

"Tobacco use undercuts military readiness and harms individual performance. Lung function is reduced, physical capabilities are diminished, hearing loss is increased, and acute medical conditions are more likely. Wounded warriors who smoke suffer from increased risk of surgical complications and delayed wound healing. Additional threats to smokers include higher risk of stroke, cancer and, for males, impotency. Smokeless tobacco brings similarly high risks of oral cancers and dental disease. Tobacco use costs DoD an estimated \$1.6 billion annually in medical costs and lost work time.

2

Quitting tobacco is one of the best things we can do to improve fitness and readiness.

"Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death; one-half of smokers will die from a smoking-related complication. For DoD, this equates to an estimated 175,000 current Active Duty Service members who will die from smoking unless we can help them quit."

Navy Medicine has long been a leader in helping men and women quit their addiction to nicotine. Medical practitioners and pharmacies provide resources and advice in clinics, aboard ship and online: <http://go.usa.gov/cYtUJ>.

Healthcare providers know the dangers to warfighters – increased injuries and decreased stamina and lung capacity – so they provide Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products such as NRT gum and patches.

My advice to smokers: take advantage of these therapies. My advice to nonsmokers: don't start. My advice to leaders in our ranks: lead by example.

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus said, "Today, tobacco use is the most avoidable public health hazard in the Navy and Marine Corps."

With the new state law beginning January 1, the State of Hawaii is helping us make it easier to quit tobacco – or, better yet, prevent our youngest shipmates from ever getting hooked.

The new smoking age law in Hawaii makes good sense and supports the good health of our service members and their families. It's really hard to make a logical argument against improved health and readiness and cost savings to both individuals and the government – I'm just saying.