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Prevalence of tobacco use and profile of tobacco users in primary care practices in Greece

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Background & Aim: Rates of tobacco use in Greece are amongst the highest in Europe (38%). Primary care providers are very well positioned to motivate a quit attempt and support cessation in patients. However, little is known about the characteristics of tobacco users in primary care settings in Greece. The aim of this study is to report on the prevalence of tobacco use and characteristics of tobacco users identified in primary care practices sampled.

Method: We conducted a cross-sectional survey of patients from 15 general practitioners from the Primary Care Research Network (Heraklion, Greece). The study took place from June and September 2015. Consecutive patients from participating primary care practices were screened and individuals reporting current tobacco use completed a brief exit survey to document demographic, brief medical history, and smoking related characteristics.

Results: Tobacco use prevalence was 38% among patients screened in the primary care clinics sampled. A total of 524 eligible patients participated in the survey (mean age 47.6 years, SD 14.3; 59.5% male; 22% with less than high school education). Tobacco users smoked an average of 26.0 (SD 13.7) cigarettes per day for an average of 22.3 (SD 11.6) years. The majority (64.1%) of tobacco users reported a readiness to quit smoking in the next 6-months, with 24.7% of patients reporting an interest in quitting in the next 30-days. However the majority (63.4%) of tobacco users reported not having made a quit attempt in the past year.

Conclusions: We found similar rates of tobacco use and daily tobacco consumption among patients screened in primary care practice settings as that reported by national surveys. This study provides new information on the characteristics of tobacco users identified in primary care practices in Greece, which can be used to inform the design of future intervention programs within general practice settings.