Hospital anti-smoking advice not up to snuff, nor snus

By ACSH Staff — October 14, 2011

Are hospitals really doing enough to help smokers quit the dangerous habit? The numbers seem impressive: The records show that they are providing advice on smoking cessation to 99 percent of heart attack patients, 97 percent of heart failure patients, and 95 percent of pneumonia patients. But a recent study in the Archives of Internal Medicine suggests that they’re not doing an adequate job.

Regulations established nine years ago require hospitals to provide advice or counseling upon discharge to patients who smoke, after they’ve been hospitalized for heart attack, heart failure, or pneumonia. The new study shows, however, that this regulation has no teeth. As this study’s lead author reports, There are anecdotal reports of hospitals putting a postcard in the patient’s room saying, you should quit smoking and checking off the box. Overall, the study found that, while the hospitals were able to officially follow the rules, the rules were too easy to fulfill.

An advisory panel is now in the process of revising these rules and, among other requirements, the new regulations will require hospitals to follow up with patients a month after discharge. ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan notes that it may be difficult for hospitals to comply with more extensive rules, observing, It’s one thing to just say, You’ve had a heart attack, stop smoking. Yet it’s quite another to go beyond that, which is what hospitals are going to have to do in order to really help patients quit. Many hospital workers may not have the proper training for this.