Introduction

Although most vascular patients know that smoking is detrimental, most have difficulty stopping. The nicotine receptor sites in the brain increase over the years of smoking, especially in women. Even if a patient says “Doc, I can stop,” the nicotine receptors say, “No, you need a smoke.”

The literature supports Chantix as a useful pharmacologic adjunct to smoking cessation. However, patients often face two problems with Chantix: cost and side effects. The cost without insurance or coupons is $150-200 per month. The most common side effect that leads to discontinuance is disturbed sleep or vivid, disturbing dreams. Some patients feel more nervous. If not taken with food, Chantix can upset the stomach. The FDI has reviewed all the data, and the early accusation that Chantix makes patients depressed and suicidal is false. If the patient was depressed or suicidal before taking Chantix, these symptoms may be exacerbated.

Personal Practice Experience

In the past five years, I have personally prescribed and managed over 400 vascular patients who have taken Chantix. These patients have suggested to me that the following ten steps helped them use Chantix successfully.
Ten Steps to Successful Chantix Use and Smoking Cessation

1. The physician should **acknowledge** in an empathic way that smoking cessation is difficult and that you will personally work with the patient to get off all tobacco products. (Yelling or threatening frankly seldom works.)

2. **Explain the reason for tobacco addiction** is the nicotine receptor area in the brain. Without controlling and eliminating these receptors, permanent smoking cessation is unlikely to happen.

3. **Reassure the patient that Chantix will be safe** and successful if used in a program tailored for them. Dose can be adjusted so that side effects are not a real problem.

4. **Ask the patient to pick a “stop date”** that is 8-10 days after starting Chantix. I usually suggest a Saturday or Sunday since these are generally lower stress days.

5. **Ask the patient to reduce immediately the number of cigarettes** is being consumed, e.g. one pack to half pack. And, spread them throughout the day, especially smoking at favorite times, e.g., after meal or with coffee.

6. Always take the second dose each day between 4-6 PM with a snack. **Avoid taking Chantix after supertime to reduce sleep disturbance.**

7. If the patient experiences sleep disturbance or other bothersome side effects, **reduce the Chantix dose back to a level that is tolerable.** For example, some patients only need the 1 mg AM dose and can do without the PM dose or may only need 0.5 mg for the PM dose. Let them adjust the dose to suit them.

8. **See the patient back in the office within three weeks** to see how they are doing and make any adjustments. If they cannot afford or tolerate Chantix, consider Wellbutrin. Don’t punt this responsibility to the PCP!

9. Recheck all patients at 2-3 months in the office and **celebrate smoking cessation if they have achieved it!** They really appreciate your thanking them. Often their families will have stopped smoking, too.

10. Finally, if they stop and then “fall of the wagon” and resume smoking, **work with them again.** Chantix can be used chronically, e.g. 1 mg PO daily for maintenance helps some inveterate smokers.