

Tar Wars Evaluation—A Multi-Factorial Approach

Past, Present, and Future Efforts

Tar Wars is uniquely positioned among youth tobacco-free education programs. Tar Wars, which is supported by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), not only has published and unpublished research on the effectiveness of the program but is also consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Guidelines for School Health Programs to Prevent Tobacco Use*. Tar Wars can and should be considered a necessary component of a state's comprehensive, youth tobacco education plan.

Various evaluations of the AAFP Tar Wars program have been or are in the process of being conducted. A **qualitative** evaluation based on the student, teacher, and presenter perspectives generated a published article, titled "Evaluation of a Youth Education Program: Student, Teacher, and Presenter Perspectives," that appeared in the October 2000 issue of the *Journal of School Nursing* (Vol. 16, Issue No. 4). This study describes a cross-sectional evaluation of the Tar Wars program among fifth-grade students (n=888), along with impressions from classroom teachers and program presenters. Results of the study revealed a high level of satisfaction with the program and positive, short-term changes in knowledge of tobacco use. Students indicated an understanding of key program elements, classroom teachers believed the program was worthwhile in presenting unique information, and presenters exhibited enthusiasm for the ease of and future opportunities for presentation. Results also revealed that all constituencies involved with Tar Wars were highly satisfied with this youth tobacco education program.

Conclusions drawn from a **quantitative** evaluation that addressed the longitudinal impact of a tobacco education program suggest sustained improvements in knowledge and attitudes related to tobacco use as a result of participation in an in-class youth tobacco use prevention program. Students in the intervention group exhibited greater recognition of the health effects, cost, and image distortion associated with tobacco use compared to peers who had not been exposed to the Tar Wars program. A subsequent manuscript on the findings of this study has been submitted and is under consideration for publication.

A third evaluation model utilizes pre- and post-test data to measure a student's knowledge of and attitude changes regarding tobacco use. Data is collected from all participating states and compiled at the national office. Results are represented on a national level, and states are provided with a summary specific to their state that they can then use to apply for grants and funding. Data for the 1999-2000 academic year were collected from 533 schools in 34 states and Guam with a total of 21,720 student responses received. Results of this evaluation show a 93 percent satisfaction rate with the Tar Wars program, nearly 90 percent correctly answered the knowledge-based questions, and 92 percent responded that they would not use tobacco in the coming year. These results have not been submitted for publication.

An evaluation of the "Tar Wars With a Twist" program is currently under way. This program, in which teens teach Tar Wars along with an adult presenter, is being implemented in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A number of other states, including Colorado, Illinois, and Indiana, are adopting this innovative style of peer-led instruction with favorable results. A larger, multi-stage evaluation is planned within the next year. Additional supporting material includes an article titled "School Nurses as Advocates for Youth Tobacco Education Programs: The Tar Wars Experience" that was published in the October 1998 issue of the *Journal of School Health* (Volume 68, Number 8).

Please forward any information regarding evaluations being conducted in your area to the AAFP Tar Wars program at **(800) TAR-WARS** or via e-mail to **tarwars@aafp.org**.