

Evaluation of a campaign to increase quitline fax referral service utilization

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Background



NC Tobacco Use Quitline (Quitline NC):

- Launched in November 2005.
- Provides free telephone-based cessation support

Fax Referral Service:

- Assists health care providers in connecting patients to Quitline NC using a fax referral form

Prior Research:

- Potential for fax referral has been demonstrated in other states.¹⁻²
- No prior research has been published evaluating low-cost campaigns to promote its use by health care providers.

Promotional Campaign:

- The NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund Commission funded a fax referral service marketing campaign in February 2006.
- **The campaign included a direct mailing (tube in the shape of a large cigarette) to 6,197 physicians across NC (Figure 1).**

Tube Mailing to Physicians

Figure 1.

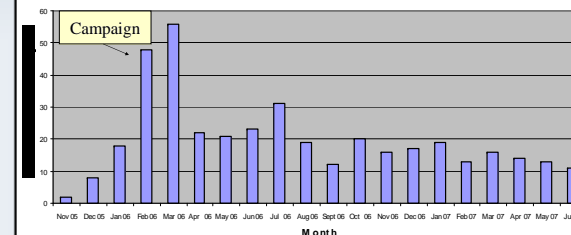


Promotional Campaign Materials:

- Letter to office managers
- Tube mailing to physicians containing letter, Quitline NC poster, brochure, and fax referral form.

Effect on Fax Referrals

Figure 2. Number of fax referrals over time (n=399)
November 2005-June 2007



Methods

The campaign was evaluated by the UNC Tobacco Prevention and Evaluation Program using a **follow-up mail survey**.

- Follow-up survey included **14 Likert-scale questions** designed to assess fax referral familiarity, utilization, & intention to use.
- Survey was **mailed in October 2006 to a 10% random sample of providers (n=618)** who were sent the original mailing.
- Results from returned surveys were analyzed using SPSS.
- 4% of the returned surveys were ineligible to be used, or returned without forwarding addresses, leaving **595 valid surveys**.
- Caller intake data from Quitline NC vendor were also analyzed to examine number of callers who were referred by fax over time.

Results

- 271 physicians returned valid surveys for a **response rate of 46%**.
- **44% of respondents remembered receiving the promotional tube.** Strong relationships existed between receiving the mailing, reading the materials, and resultant familiarity with the fax referral service..
- **40% of respondents reported familiarity with the fax referral service** following the promotional mailing.
- **Only 3.5% of survey respondents reported referring a patient to Quitline NC using the fax referral service** in the previous six months.
- **29% of respondents reported that they intended to use the fax referral service** in the next six months.
- **While utilization of the fax referral service increased during the months of the promotional campaign, rates decreased to around baseline levels in the following months (Figure 2).**
- Providers who used the service reported that they were **satisfied, found it easy to use, and would use it again.**



Discussion

Utilization of the fax referral service and familiarity with 5A counseling appeared highest among family physicians. **Future promotional campaigns should consider whether targeting certain types of providers would be most cost effective.**

Additional research is needed on how to most effectively reach providers with information about the fax referral service (e.g., focus groups with providers about strategies and formats).

Potential limitations:

- 8-month time period between campaign and follow-up survey.
- Only about one half of the providers surveyed responded; thus, the results represent a best case scenario for understanding current fax referral utilization & familiarity among selected NC providers.

Conclusions

The promotional campaign temporarily increased utilization of the fax referral service but did not sustain rates over time.

Despite lack of sustained benefit from this campaign, increased utilization of the fax referral service in NC has great potential.

Formative research should guide the design of future fax referral promotional campaigns.



1. Perry RJ, Keller PA, Fraser D, Fiore MC. Fax to quit: a model for delivery of tobacco cessation services to Wisconsin residents. *WJM*. 2005; 104(4): 37-40.
2. Bentz CJ, Bayley KB, Bonin KE, Fleming L, Hollis JF, McAfee T. The feasibility of connecting physician offices to a state-level tobacco quit line. *Am J Prev Med*. 2006;30: 31-7.