

The Doctor Said It Was Okay

Category: Smoking

written by David Coulter | August 4, 2021

When I was a third-year medical student in 1972, the young attending physician on my cardiology rotation said smoking was okay. Actually, he said that he had wanted to do something to manage the stress of his work and had looked carefully into the options that were available at that time. He told us that smoking a pipe seemed like the safest option, so that is what he did.

As a good medical student, I took his advice and started smoking a pipe, too. Fortunately my internship was at Duke, known locally as "Mr. Duke's Hospital" because it was founded by James B. Duke, the owner of the American Tobacco Company. Smoking was okay at Duke. In fact, there was a cigarette machine in the hospital lobby at the time.

I continued smoking a pipe all through residency and subsequent medical practice. It was just what the doctor had said it would be, a way to relax and manage stress. Plus, I really enjoyed collecting (and smoking) a beautiful assortment of hand-carved pipes.

By the time I reached my fifties, I realized smoking was not healthy and started trying to quit. It took several years, but I finally quit on August 23, 2010.

I did not realize until after I quit how addicted I had been to nicotine. My dental hygienist had quit smoking, too, and understood that the urge to smoke never really goes away. We both agreed that if we were ever told we had only six months to live, we would go out smoking.

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