ISSN 0028-4793 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMc1500342

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DOI: 10.1056/NEJMc1500342

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Cytosine versus Nicotine for Smoking Cessation

TO THE EDITOR: Walker et al. (Dec. 18 issue) describe the use of cytosine, as compared with nicotine, for smoking cessation. Although cytosine is perceived as a novelty in the West, it has been used in daily medical practice in Poland for more than 50 years. In 1976, the first English-language study on the use of cytosine in Poland was published, based on the observations of 1968 patients. Cytosine is currently undergoing a renaissance in Poland. Two Polish studies — a cohort study conducted in 2003 through 2005 and a randomized, controlled trial conducted in 2006 through 2010 — showed the safety and effectiveness of the drug. In 2012, a Polish generic drug company broke the monopoly by introducing a new cytosine product, Desmoxan. Cytosine is very inexpensive in Poland, costing under $20 for full treatment. Its consumption has grown by factor of 10 since 2000 (Fig. 1). In 2013 alone, after cytosine became available over the counter and was heavily advertised, sales of the drug doubled. The use of cytosine is widespread, and it is considered to be safe by medical professionals and consumers. It seems that the use of cytosine is a major factor behind the decline in smoking in Poland — in the past 2 years, 500,000 smokers have quit. It is certainly desirable for this success to be replicated elsewhere.

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No potential conflict of interest relevant to this letter was reported.


Figure 1. Total Units of Cytosine Purchased as Smoking-Cessation Therapy in Poland, 2000–2013.

Each unit (or package) of cytosine is one full treatment for smoking cessation. The solid black line indicates the trend in sales between 2000 and 2013.