Handout: Quitting Smoking and Weight Concerns

One difficulty of quitting smoking is that people fear they may gain weight. This varies between people: some gain no weight, or lose weight, while others may gain weight.

Your mind-set is critical for successfully achieving and maintaining abstinence. Research indicates that people who try to diet while quitting smoking tend to have poor outcomes for both. Set aside concerns about weight gain at this time in order to really focus on the challenges and demands of quitting smoking. When these concerns start appearing, you may often need to get in touch with your motivations for quitting.

Here are some brief points about smoking and weight gain:

- ✓ There are a couple reasons for weight gain following smoking cessation: 1) Nicotine is a stimulant, and so makes the body burn calories faster and also decreases appetite. So, when people quit, their metabolism slows down a little, and they may not have a normal appetite for some time. 2) People who quit often substitute snacking for the hand-to-hand mouth behavior of smoking, and for the sensory stimulation. This can lead to weight gain.

- ✓ You may worry about the negative **health** effects of weight gain. If you smoke one pack of cigarettes per day, this is equivalent, in terms of stress to the heart, of being 90 pounds overweight. Thus, health will be BETTER even if you gain some weight.

- ✓ You may also worry about your **appearance** if you gain weight. Weight gain from increased snacking after smoking cessation can be managed by snacking on vegetables, or sugar-free snacks and chewing gum, rather than calorie rich snack foods. Also, you may benefit from regular exercise for its many benefits – such as distraction from cravings and stress management – as well as a strategy for weight management.

Tip: If weight gain is a concern for you, consider setting a small goal for yourself (e.g., choosing to eat a piece of fruit when craving something sweet) this upcoming week.