Smoking Ban Leveraged Abstinence by 4.1%

BY HILLEL KUTTLER

BALTIMORE — Minnesota's passage of a ban on smoking in bars and restaurants made smokers 4.1% more likely to quit, compared with pre-ban smokers.

The state's 2007 enactment of the Freedom to Breathe Act had a significant effect on abstinence, although it was not as strong a factor as a smoker having a high level of confidence in quitting (12.3%), degree of utilization of cessation programs (7.8%-18.4%), and use of nicotine replacement therapy (7.5%) and other medications, according to a poster presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco.

The cross-sectional study surveyed 2,917 people enrolled in four tobacco cessation programs conducted by ClearWay Minnesota, a nonprofit smoking cessation research and public outreach group.

The study data reflect the period 2 years prior to the 2007 enactment and 1 year afterward. Data were collected at each participant's time of enrollment in the cessation program and then each individual was surveyed 7 months later.

The study, conducted by Professional Data Analysts (PDA), a Minneapolis firm, found that the statewide ban's influence was "diluted" in areas that already had a ban—for each year of living in such areas, smokers were 2.5% less likely to have the ban affect their decision to remain abstinent.

Julie Rainey, PDA's vice president, surmised that smokers who had already been living under a local ban had by then adapted their behaviors by stepping outside to smoke or by not smoking at all.

The statewide ban further affected social norms, because "smoking was more stigmatized," she said. ■