LEVELS OF STIGMA

INDIVIDUAL (self-stigma)
Smokers and former smokers may blame themselves for developing lung cancer.

“I FEEL A LOT OF GUILT AND SHAME, BELIEVING THAT I CAUSED MY OWN CANCER BECAUSE I WAS A SMOKER AND THEN BELIEVING THAT OTHER PEOPLE FEEL THAT WAY ABOUT ME TOO.”

FAMILY AND FRIENDS
Loved ones may express blame due to sadness, anger and concern.

“I OVERHEARD MY WIFE SAY, ‘THESE WERE TO BE OUR HAPPY YEARS... I’M SO ANGRY AT HOW HIS SMOKING HAS TAKEN AWAY OUR FUTURE!’”

SOCIETY
Lung cancer may be perceived as a “smoker’s disease” by some individuals (in the public, media, government and healthcare profession). As a result, you may receive less compassion and support than you deserve.

“When I told my neighbor that I had lung cancer, he said, ‘What did you expect? You smoked— you got lung cancer!’”

Lung Cancer Alliance is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to providing information, support and advocacy for people living with lung cancer and those at risk for the disease.

ENDING INJUSTICE AND SAVING LIVES THROUGH AN ALLIANCE OF ADVOCACY, EDUCATION AND SUPPORT.

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The mission of APOS is to advance the science and practice of psychosocial care for people with cancer.
WHAT IS LUNG CANCER STIGMA?

Lung cancer stigma is the expression of negative attitudes toward someone or something thought to be socially unacceptable. This can lead to fear and misunderstanding and may result from lack of information. Stigma is not new and is not unique to lung cancer. Lung cancer stigma may cause a feeling of discomfort when others say or do things that unconsciously or openly blame you for getting the disease. Stigma can be experienced as disrespect by you and can prevent you from getting the care, treatment and compassion you need.

WHY DOES LUNG CANCER STIGMA HAPPEN?

As the dangers of smoking became known, well-intended efforts to restrict it often caused a negative reaction to smokers. Because a history of smoking is so closely associated with lung cancer, the disease is still seen by many as something you did to yourself.

WHAT CAN AFFECT MY CARE AND RECOVERY?

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HOW MIGHT STIGMA AFFECT ME?

You may respond to stigma in different ways. Reactions may include:

- Guilt and shame can drain your energy. Try to stay focused on yourself and your treatment. If you need help, consider talking with a therapist about your feelings.
- Stress in relationships
- Increased feelings of guilt, shame, stress, anxiety, anger and depression
- Delaying treatment, not remaining on treatment, or not seeking treatment at all
- Stress in relationships with family and friends
- Loss of hope

WE CANNOT CHANGE THE PAST.

You may have feelings about yourself or experience negative reactions from others that can be described as lung cancer stigma. This brochure can help if you do.

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