

# The hubbly bubbly misconception

**Roxanne Jones**

THE 4TH YEAR UCT medical students, in association with the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA), recently did a research project on hookah smoking.

The motivation behind the research was to gain a better understanding of the knowledge, attitudes and practices involved with hookah pipe smoking. The research, which was conducted at the UCT Health Science Faculty, was split into two parts.

According to Nicolina van de Merwe, the head of mental health at SHAWCO Health, the first part of the research was to investigate what constitutes hookah pipe smoking. In the second part of the research the students, along with CANSA, developed a health promotion campaign.

This took place in the form of contributing posters, posting on social networks sites and hosting an awareness day which was entitled "The Hubbly Bubbly Awareness Day".

Van de Merwe states, "The awareness day was very successful and over a 100 students participated. We had a smokilyzer machine where students could test their carbon monoxide levels."

The findings of the research showed that while hookah pipe smoking is commonly perceived to be safer than cigarette smoking, smoking hookah may be equivalent to or worse than cigarette smoking.

Billie-Jean Demas, a Film and Media production stream student explained how she smoked hookah

for recreational reasons. "I do [it] because it's lighter than cigarettes and I usually smoke it when I go to night clubs or lounges as it is only R45."

Each hookah pipe session is longer in duration than cigarette smoking and involves exposure to much larger volumes of smoke per session.

"I like it [hookah smoking], it does not give off the smell that cigarettes do," explained Naadirah Deaney, a BSocSci student.

However, the hookah pipe does contain harmful substances such as nicotine and other toxic and carcinogenic compounds such as carbon monoxide, formaldehyde, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, arsenic and lead.

Mishka Kadir, a health science student, explained how she dislikes hookah smoking. "It's unhealthy and I don't have access to a hubbly bubbly."

Research shows that long-term effects of hookah pipe smoking is a risk factor of a number of tobacco related diseases such as lung cancer, periodontal diseases, cardiovascular disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Interestingly, among South Africans and abroad, it is believed that hookah has less nicotine and is less addictive than cigarette smoking, and that the water in the base of the hookah apparatus filters out the toxins, making it less harmful.

However, through this research project, it is evident that a lack of knowledge is a crucial factor in determining misconceptions, beliefs and attitudes regarding hookah pipe smoking and how harmful it is for ones self.

**smoking hookah may be equivalent to or worse than cigarette smoking**