

COMMUNITY NEWS & PHOTO RELEASE

January 18, 2013

Local Anti-Tobacco Champion Celebrated During National Non-Smoking Week

*The Lung Association & Heart and Stroke Foundation honour **Richmond's Ray Ali** for his contribution and commitment to helping people quit smoking.*

Richmond's Ray Ali, regional manager for independent, tobacco-free pharmacy chain The Medicine Shoppe, is one of 10 BC individuals being recognized as a 2013 Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Award Winner by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (B.C. & Yukon). (See [here](#) a full list of 2013 award winners).

As a business manager and health advocate, Ray is committed to improving and increasing pharmacists' ability to help customers become tobacco-free and manage their chronic health challenges. His most recent venture is a course in quit smoking counselling for pharmacists across the province, which he helped design and promote.

Scott McDonald, CEO of the BC Lung Association, cites Ray's efforts to empower pharmacists in the area with counseling and his help developing and promoting province-wide quit smoking training as reasons for the award.

"Ray's an innovator within BC's pharmacy community and is playing a key role in helping build pharmacists' capacity to help British Columbians lead healthier, tobacco-free lives," says Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon).

Ray's Story

Ray's career in the pharmacy industry began only seven years ago, but his interest in helping people quit smoking originated long ago closer to home.

"I watched my cousin struggle to quit for years. In fact, he's still struggling," he says. "Smoking is a serious addiction and people who smoke need all the help and support they can get."

Since joining the Medicine Shoppe, Ray has put his entrepreneurial strengths to work, establishing a quit smoking training program for pharmacists, as well as developing partnerships with the BC Lung Association QuitNow Team, the Canadian Mental Health Association and others.

"As I began to learn how much broader the pharmacist's role could be, a light went on," he says. "I recognized a lot could be achieved by creating synergies with health organizations who shared a similar view of the pharmacist's expanding role."

According to Ray, pharmacists are eager to learn – and to expand the ways in which they help customers. Since launching his quit smoking training, he's received rave reviews from participants.

"I've been overwhelmed with the positive feedback," he says. "Many pharmacists have taken time to contact me and relay that the quit smoking training is the best continuing education they've had since graduating from pharmacy school. Their feedback speaks volumes."

Based on the program's success, Ray plans to take the training national, with a little help from willing allies. He says, "We have 170 Medicine Shoppe Pharmacies across Canada and 70 have already expressed interest. The trick will be finding partners in other provinces, like we have here in BC, but I'm optimistic!"

About the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards

Winners of the Champion for Tobacco-Free Living Awards are chosen by the BC Lung Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation (B.C. & Yukon) for their long-term contribution to clearing the air of second-hand smoke, helping people quit smoking and encouraging British Columbians to stay tobacco-free. Nominees are selected by BC community members, public health staff and health care professionals. Launched in 2013, the awards will be announced annually during January National Non-Smoking Week.

Scott McDonald, CEO, BC Lung Association

"Recent headlines have many thinking the most pressing public health concerns are obesity, lack of physical activity or perhaps illegal drug use. All are important. However, the leading cause of preventable death in British Columbia is tobacco-related illness. We need champions like those we are honouring this week to help put tobacco use reduction on the public radar."

Diego Marchese, CEO, Heart and Stroke Foundation (BC & Yukon)

"We feel it's extremely important to honour and acknowledge the important work being done by individuals and organizations to affect positive social change. Actions to reduce tobacco use and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke are amongst the most important measures available to increase overall public health."

About the Heart and Stroke Foundation

The Heart and Stroke Foundation (heartandstroke.ca), a volunteer-based health charity, leads in eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and its application, the promotion of healthy living, and advocacy.

About the BC Lung Association

The BC Lung Association, a non-profit, non-governmental organization, is dedicated to improving lung health and promoting clean air initiatives across the province. Through public awareness campaigns, the Association acts as an educational resource for the general public as well as those living with respiratory conditions. The BC Lung Association also specializes in patient support programs, community services and advanced medical research.

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