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WORCESTER. There are 115 colleges and universities in Massachusetts. Twelve of them have gone tobacco-free.

On Friday, representatives from about 35 Massachusetts colleges gathered at the University of Massachusetts Medical School for a symposium on banning tobacco products on their campuses.

"It really ticks me off to see the number of young people smoking," said UMass Medical Chancellor Dr. Michael F. Collins. The campus banned tobacco products on campus in 2008.

"It wasn't easy, but it was the right thing to do," he said.

He said the school has used a "gentle hand" to push smoking off the campus while providing support with free nicotine patches as well as therapy to more than 500 students, faculty and staff who want to quit.

Representatives from all 115 Massachusetts schools were invited to the event. Attendees from the Worcester area included representatives from Assumption College, Becker College, Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester State University and Quinsigamond Community College.

Of those, Quinsigamond Community College and UMass Medical School have implemented tobacco-free policies on their campuses. Representatives from both schools made presentations at the event.

Philip Clay, dean of students at WPI, said his school is considering a campuswide tobacco ban, and that the symposium was helpful to learn more about the process and issues that could arise.

Along with the Holy Cross representatives, Mr. Clay said Friday afternoon he was relieved to hear that it is normal for responders who did not smoke to oppose a ban because they believe it was a restriction on their civil rights, while the majority of smokers surveyed would support it.

Holy Cross, along with Fallon Community Health Plan, has developed a Worksite Wellness program for students, faculty and staff. The program includes a smoking-cessation program.

The school has also conducted a survey to gather opinions about tobacco use at the college, said Fran Taylor, director of wellness for the school.

Clark University is also focused on health and wellness initiatives and hopes to continue conversations on the topic with students to decide the best course of action.

"We want to get a student perspective," said Paul Wykes, business manager at the school. He noted that the biggest challenge for Clark would be implementation in an urban campus, which runs the risk of pushing some smokers onto public sidewalks and into the neighborhood.

The symposium featured a handful of speakers who shed light on the negative effects of tobacco products but also detailed specific steps colleges can take to ban smoking on their campuses.

An issue that came up during the question and answer session was whether banning smoking would deter international students from enrolling. Many colleges depend on international students because they often pay full tuition and therefore are an important source of revenue. John Auerbach, a distinguished professor of practice and the director of the Institute on Urban Health Research at Northeastern University, said the school did not experience a dip in international enrollment because of the ban.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Howard Koh, who was appointed by President Barack Obama as the Assistant Secretary for Health and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Organizer Tami Gouveia, executive director of Tobacco Free Mass., said that in the next year, she hopes to have at least 30 tobacco-free college campuses in the state.

State Sen. Harriette L. Chandler, D-Worcester, as well as Cheryl Bartlett, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, also spoke at the event.