

Keeping up with the Tobacco Debate

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A media war is underway in America. The victor's prize will be the public's views on tobacco use.

Keeping up with this public debate can prove to be one of the most interesting reading experiences that you are likely to find. A series of newsletters on this issue is currently being published and can be received free of charge. In this brief review I hope to introduce you to these publications and to encourage you to be asked to be put on these publications' mailing lists.

The tobacco industry is worried. Adult smoking is at an all time low of 28%. The social acceptance of smoking is rapidly disappearing. This is being brought about by laws which ban smoking on airplanes, limit smoking on the job, and even designate entire cities as being "smoke-free-environments." This has led the major tobacco companies to begin a propaganda campaign. The industry publications are usually slick, free, subtle, and are produced on a monotonously regular basis.

For a quick read, "The Tobacco Observer" (1875 Eye Street NW, Washington, DC 20006) is hard to beat. "The Tobacco Observer" is produced by the Tobacco Institute which is the cooperative propaganda arm of the tobacco industry. In this magazine you will learn how wonderful the tobacco industry is. For example you will find out that the industry is helping to reduce your taxes. Specifically targetted are the "regressive taxes" such as on cigarettes. The poor smoke more than the wealthy, therefore taxing cigarettes is socially unjust! Or you will read how the tobacco industry is helping to teach fire safety to the hearing impaired. The fact that smoking is responsible for 50% of the 5,000 deaths each year in house fires, is overlooked. Or you may read that the council for tobacco research has provided over \$110,000,000 to 592 "independent scientists." The publication usually includes an historical article about tobacco ("Duke Homestead: Living Museum of Tobacco History") to show the ties between our culture and tobacco use. In general this is humorous, blatantly propagandist, and quick read. It should be a must for all physicians' libraries.

The second industry publication is the glossy "Philip Morris Magazine." This is filled with many human interest stories. The goal of this publication is positive public relations for the company rather than a direct attack on nonsmokers. Each issue has at least one story about a famous individual who is usually a smoker. In addition, public recognition awards are given to people on their 100th birthday ("I've smoked every day for 84 years.")

To find out what is going on in your state you should get on the mailing list of the "Smoker" (1850 M Street NW, Suite 900, Washington, DC 20036). An issue of this publication goes out regularly for each state as a "service of Philip Morris USA." The goal of this publication is to promote smokers' rights. When the American Lung Association had its annual "Smokeout Day" this publication organized the "Great American Choice Day." Readers received a "Great American Smokers' Kit" which included a red, white, and blue bumper sticker claiming "I smoke and I vote."

The final industry publication is "Choice" (R.J. Reynolds USA, P.O. Box 227015, Dallas, TX 75222-7015). This is a relatively new publication. The regular columns include "Smokers in Jeopardy," "Legislative Score Card," and "Smoker to Smoker." The aim of this publication is to recruit smoking activists to attack the efforts of the "antismoking zealots." According to this publication the antismoking laws are designed to "legitimize the harassment of smokers by nonsmokers."

In contrast to industry publications, the nonsmoking publications are nonglossy and sporadic in their mailing patterns. They suffer as much from a lack of money as the tobacco industry benefits from an excess of resources. Although these publications will be sent free of charge, they usually include a request for a donation to the parent organization.

The most refreshing and activist of these publications is the "DOC News and Views" (DOC, HH-101, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, GA 30912). This is the newsletter of the physician group DOC which has spearheaded the attack on the tobacco industry for the past 10 years. This newsletter has served as the source for many of the health promotion ideas which are now accepted by traditional medicine. These include an ad ban on tobacco products, attention to the spread of tobacco industry methods to the third world, "doctoring" up billboards which demonstrate tobacco products, removing magazines which contain tobacco ads from physician office waiting rooms, and the sending of "obituary cards" to congressmen when a patient dies of a smoking related illness. This newsletter is wonderful reading.

The second newsletter of this type is the "Smoking and Health Reporter" (American Lung Association, 1740 Broadway, New York, NY 10019). It is produced by the National Interagency Council on Smoking and Health. One nice feature is the thumbs up and thumbs down awards. The thumbs up award recently went to golfer Mark McCumber for refusing to par-

participate in the Sea Pines Heritage Gold Tournament because the \$2,000,000 prize was provided by R.J. Reynolds. The thumbs down award went to San Francisco city supervisor Nelder for buying cigarettes for the elderly. This newsletter is a good source for keeping abreast of tobacco industry activity. For example, Lorillard, Inc. has developed a new strategy to promote its products in prisons. The promotion is called "Play Ball with Newport." A prisoner will receive a 210 pound barbell set if they collect 12,000 Newport cigarette packages. In this publication you will also learn that Fidel Castro has given up smoking cigars. "I reached the conclusion long ago that the one last sacrifice I must make for Cuban public health is to stop smoking. I haven't really missed it that much."

The final newsletter is the "Tobacco and Youth Reporter" (STAT, P.O. Box 50039, Palo Alto, CA

94303). This is a good source for information about the marketing efforts of the tobacco industry, particularly as they effect children. A recent issue has had articles describing the Kent micronite filter ("gives you the greatest health protection") which contained asbestos, the CDC's unreleased report on the 8 fold increased risk of AIDS in smokers, and how R.J. Reynolds consistently violates its own code of advertising ethics.

There is a great deal of fun reading available on this important public health issue. Send off seven letters of request today.

Paul Fisher, M.D.,
Associate Professor
Medical College of Georgia
Augusta, GA 30912