

Face-off: Smoking and health — after 25 years

Keep up the pressure to end smoking

By James E. Davis
Guest columnist

DURHAM, N.C. — Despite steady gains in reducing the toll that tobacco products take every year in illness and death, we still have a long way to go toward eliminating this most pressing public health problem.

In the 25 years since the first report of the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Smoking and Health, researchers have accumulated overwhelming evidence linking tobacco with a variety of potentially fatal diseases of the heart and lungs, as well as cancer. More recently, we have also learned that tobacco, through its constituent ingredient, nicotine, is a powerful, addictive substance. This only makes the need to eliminate this public health scourge more urgent.

The past quarter-century has seen an extraordinary turnaround in public opinion. Smoking is no longer fashionable or elegant. The public wisely recognized tobacco for what it is: a threat to health, a road to sickness and death. It's estimated 1,000 people a day die of smoking and other tobacco-related illnesses — a toll made even more intolerable by the fact it's largely preventable. AMA pledges to continue to work with our public-health colleagues to snuff out cigarette smoking



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and the use of other tobacco products. We will press ahead with a broad-based educational and legislative agenda designed to help realize the surgeon general's truly achievable goal of a tobacco-free society by 2000.

Much already has been done. Restrictions on advertising and promotion are tighter than ever. Health warnings on products are stronger than ever. The rights of non-smokers to be protected from secondhand smoke are being recognized and given legal protection.

But although smoking rates have tumbled, with tens of thousands kicking the habit every year, others take their place. The decline in smoking is not as strong among those of lower educational and economic status. The industry, through slick advertising portraying smoking as hip, sexy and macho, still lures thousands of young people into nicotine addiction every year.

As physicians, we must work harder to get the stop-smoking message to these groups. We must convince them that tobacco holds no allure — just illness.

End the pressure: Enough is enough

By Brennan Dawson
Guest columnist

WASHINGTON — In their headlong rush to stamp out smoking, anti-smoking groups promote an increasingly strident agenda. The anti-smoking movement has turned to a political and social campaign that puts at risk the USA's most basic freedoms and values.

The troublesome issues only begin with the notion that others should control what legal activities we may or may not pursue. More than 50 million adults choose to smoke — a choice that makes them a target for those who would modify their behavior. But when those who disapprove of an activity seek to impose their views through regulation, harassment, taxation, discrimination and censorship, the ramifications go beyond the loss of the right to make personal decisions.

The anti-smoking crusade is willing to overlook important freedom-of-speech protections in order to ban cigarette advertising. They would seek to protect us from words and pictures they believe we can't be trusted to see and hear. But a majority recently polled do not support a cigarette-advertising ban.

The anti-smoking movement would impose moralistic and regressive tax increases on those who can least



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afford to pay. By seeking to increase the price of a product to punitive levels, anti-smokers would disagree with the majority polled who do not support an increase in cigarette taxes.

The anti-smoking crusade would single out smokers as the new group against whom it is acceptable to discriminate — and cause them to be fired or to lose job promotions because they choose to smoke at home.

Three out of four Americans recently polled did not support smoking bans in work places or restaurants. Yet anti-smokers would unilaterally ban smoking, trampling the rights of workers and business owners to decide how they should operate.

In their adamant refusal to accept even reasonable accommodation, the anti-smoking community doesn't have the support of smokers and non-smokers alike for the key elements of their campaign. The efforts of the anti-smoking movement are out of step with the mainstream of public attitudes. The issues and the opinion polls show that "enough is enough."

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