

FDA Changes Cigarette Packaging

Laura Corlin

Despite increasing knowledge about the dangers of smoking both to the smoker and to others through second-hand smoke, requirements for tobacco warnings have not changed in the past 25 years. This stagnation is due largely to the millions of dollars the tobacco industry spends daily on advertising and lobbying, an intense marketing campaign that continues to turn 1000 children a day into smokers. However, both the government and individual organizations, such as universities, are taking steps to lower this number. On June 22, 2009, President Obama signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act. This act gives the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the power to regulate, though not ban, tobacco products. On November 10, 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services and the FDA announced that by October 22, 2012, no manufacturers will be able to sell cigarettes in the United States unless they show graphic health warnings. In June the FDA will select the final nine designs to be displayed based on extensive research and public comments. This requirement is part of a national effort to reduce the number of deaths and the amount of disease caused by smoking, a movement that Tufts could do well to consider joining.

The new labels each have a message explicitly written on the package label warning about the adverse health effects and addictive nature of smoking, and informing users that quitting smoking improves health. The color images associated with each of these messages vary from a man who has had an autopsy to a child with an oxygen mask to a person smoking while cigarette smoke is exhaled from the tracheotomy hole in the smoker's neck due to an operation for throat cancer. The federal government has also helped people access preventive programs as part of their health plans, invested \$225 million for tobacco control and Quitline programs, passed an act to stop the illegal sale of tobacco products online, banned specific flavors of cigarettes that typically appeal to young users, and raised the federal cigarette tax by 62 cents per pack. Other restrictions on tobacco marketing specifically towards youth include prohibiting cigarette companies from sponsoring athletic or cultural events, requiring packages to have at least 20 cigarettes so that vendors cannot sell cheap individual cigarettes to teens to get them addicted, and prohibiting the sale of clothing that has cigarette company brands or logos.

While each of these measures is evidence-based, some of these interventions, such as increasing the cigarette tax and thus making smoking less affordable, hold more promise than others at actually decreasing the number of young new smokers. The labels may not prove especially



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effective in preventing new smokers since the messages that will be on the packages do not relate to the short-term consequences, such as bad breath, that have been shown to help deter young people from smoking. In a Dutch study of how the graphic labels required by the European Union since 2004 affected current smokers, only 10.3% said they actually smoked less because of the warnings, though 17.9% said the warnings made them want to quit smoking. A more effective strategy is to change community attitudes towards smoking.

Other studies suggest that a fairly effective strategy at reducing the demand for cigarettes by one third is a workplace and educational establishment ban on smoking. Most states have followed the research and passed laws about indoor smoking. For example, Massachusetts General Law ch. 270, § 22 (2004) states that smoking is prohibited in essentially all public spaces including workplaces, classrooms, medical facilities, restaurants, bars, schools, universities, child care centers, and on public transportation. At Tufts, smoking is also discouraged within 20 feet of residence halls. Many universities have decided that the health risks posed by smokers are unacceptable. According to American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, there are 466 college and university campuses that are completely smoke-free.

The statement by university communities that smoking is not tolerated on campuses is a positive one and in line with federal and state regulations—a campus should be a healthy and safe place to learn, research, and live. Cigarette smoke is known to cause cancer, respiratory problems, and heart disease. It reflects poorly on the school when visitors see students smoking and throwing their cigarette butts on the ground, as often happens near the library. Tufts should join in the national effort to combat the adverse health effects of smoking by considering ending our community's smoking culture.

References for this editorial can be found at
TuftScopeJournal.org

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