



Smoke gets in their eyes

By Gary Seidler

MIAMI, Florida — A small but growing band of health professionals is lighting up the town in an offbeat attempt to establish this community as a national model for good health.

DOC — Doctors Ought to Care — aims to educate the public about the dangers of cigarette smoking and other preventable causes of bad health and high hospital costs — other "killer habits" like alcohol abuse and obesity.

But, for now, the 100 or so physicians, podiatrists, dentists, nurses, and others who set-up the non-profit organization, are content to focus their energies on cigarette habituation and the "devastating physical and economic toll attributable to cigarette smoking."

DOC hopes to get its message to the community through a multi-media advertising and public relations campaign now underway.

Many bus benches in Miami now carry one of DOC's clever slogans, such as "Country Fresh Arsenic."

The zealous crusade included the recent picketing by DOC members of a Benson and Hedges Film Festival and a Virginia Slims Tennis tournament.

Carrying placards with slogans like "A Streetcar Named Emphysema" and "Yes, Virginia, There is a Cancer" DOC was the welcome recipient of considerable public attention.

Also on the target list was the Miami Herald.

Pickers made a "house call" to the daily newspaper, demanding, among other things, that the Herald make a study of the costs of cigarette smoking in Dade County and of the chemical additives in cigarettes.

In the context of an overall game plan, DOC is determined to expose the "insidious" way cigarettes are promoted.

DOC's mainspring is Dr. Alan Blum, a resident in family medicine at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Dr. Blum is not your average Miami doctor. On a \$13,500 annual income, this earnest 29-year-old has caused waves all over town, sniping at the tobacco industry, tobacco advertisers, newspapers, television . . . and he's not too thrilled with his fellow doctors either.

At the outset, Dr. Blum makes it clear he is not a tobacco prohibitionist. He does, however, believe a new generation can and should be discouraged from smoking.

And he wants his fellow physicians to get involved in the education process. He says flatly, "It is nothing short of malpractice for a physician to fail to include 'cigarette habituation as a problem on the patient's medical record."

"And it is malpractice to fail to explain to the patient — any patient, much less a coughing or breathless one — that cigarette smoking invariably causes bad health."

Dr. Blum believes there has been a large scale abdication by physicians of their primary care responsibilities; physicians, he says, are abandoning en masse their role as patient educators.

"For the physicians," adds Dr. Blum, "the personal, one-on-one teaching that is necessary to de-program the smokers or prospective smoker is too important to be relegated solely to ancillary personnel, audio visual paraphernalia, or counter-advertising by public interest groups."

Consider, says Dr. Blum:

If a physician spends only 20 to 30 minutes each day, with a pack and a half smoker per session, he or she will have strongly influenced 250 individuals in a year, who smoke 125,000 packs . . . or more than 2,500,000 cigarettes.

Dr. Blum and DOC is trying to assist the doctor to promote a non-smoking, good health philosophy.

DOC is developing educational materials with in-



Alan Blum — Crusader Extraordinaire

formation about the nature of cigarettes and the supposedly lesser or greater risks of certain brands.

Says Dr. Blum:

"If there is one myth we can dispel about cigarette smoking, it is that a low-tar, low-nicotine, filter cigarette is 'safer.' Actually, those who are unable to stop smoking and who switch to the newer, so-called lighter brands are just as likely to smoke more, doubtless in part to obtain the nicotine they crave."

"They are therefore susceptible to inhaling great quantities of carbon monoxide, ammonia, cyanide, and the several hundred other poisonous gases, which are at least as dangerous as tar and nicotine."

Unfortunately, since no governmental agency regulates the manufacture of cigarettes, the tobacco companies have never revealed the names of the 2,000 separate chemical additives they admit are used in these smoking guns."

Tear-sheets containing definitions of "tar and nicotine," "carbon-monoxide" and "milligram" are being printed for distribution by physicians and other health professionals to patients.

Also, prescription pads indicating potentially effective methods to stop smoking are being produced.

And for physicians offices, displays featuring novelty items such as miniature park benches, toy animals, balloons and cardboard mannequins will offer new, daily good health messages.

Physicians will be encouraged to scrutinize the kinds of magazines they make available in their waiting rooms. At the very least, says DOC, magazines which carry an inordinate amount of cigarette advertising ought not to overshadow those which have chosen to protect their readerships by not accepting cigarette ads.

Dr. Blum saves his harshest condemnation for the "tobacco lords, with their annual \$400 million programming" and their advertising "hit-men and hit-women who would have it that adults have heard the 'facts' or 'both sides' and now have a free choice to decide whether or not to smoke."

Dr. Blum says just as emphysema, ischemic heart disease, and lung cancer have reached epidemic proportions in our society, so the tobacco industry's economic entrenchment within the journalistic community has reached a distressing level.

It is one thing, he adds, to ignore the facts of health, but quite another "to acquiesce in the sale of carcinogen."

"For the tobacco advertising forces to have dispensed billions of dollars in propaganda 'aimed only at adults' and then to attribute the epidemic of child and adolescent cigarette abuse to 'peer pressure' does their trade too little credit or credibility," says Blum.

Blum and his supporters are not optimistic about the federal government's commitment to discourage cigarette smoking or its promotion.

"With tunnel vision, the federal bureaucracy and Congress eye the \$7 billion in annual revenue which all governments derive from the sale of tobacco and products, but are blind to the estimated \$30 billion expenditure on tobacco-related disease, not including annual workdays lost and funeral expenses."