

SICK WASHINGTON BEDFELLOWS:  
Lobbyists Represent Health Clients and Tobacco Industry

Lobbyists for the tobacco industry and health-related organizations are often one and the same, according to a new analysis released by DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), a national health promotion group.

More than 600 different Washington, D.C.,-based law firms, public relations specialists, and lobbying groups are hired each year by American corporations and associations to protect their legislative and regulatory interests on Capitol Hill. The activities of these representatives in behalf of their clients help shape national policy and affect public health.

The American tobacco industry is comprised of 28 companies and associations, which are represented in Washington by more than 45 lobbying or public affairs firms. These firms in turn represent more than 150 health-related companies or organizations. For example, two of the three clients of the lobbying firm of Stanton & Associates are tobacco giant Philip Morris and University Hospitals of Cleveland. The Association of Community Cancer Centers and the National Council of Community Hospitals are represented by Swidler & Berlin, which also represents Lorillard Tobacco Company. Gold and Liebengood, which represents Philip Morris, also looks after the interests of five medical societies, including the American College of Cardiology and the College of American Pathologists.

Five of the 11 clients of Ogilvy Adams and Rinehart--another Philip Morris consultant--are health-related organizations, including the American Hospital Association and the Group Health Association (the national organization of HMOs). Among the clients of Griffin, Johnson & Associates are Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Yale-New Haven Hospital, and the Tobacco Institute. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, Pfizer pharmaceuticals, Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, and Stanford University all share the Washington consulting firm of Wunder, Diefenderfer, Cannon & Thelen. Similarly, in addition to aiding the United States Tobacco Company (UST), O'Connor & Hannan represents no fewer than eight health-related organizations.

"This helps to explain the inactivity of so many health groups and companies in countering the single most preventable cause of death, disease, and high medical costs: tobacco," noted Dr. Alan Blum, chairman of DOC, which has monitored the tobacco industry since 1977. "Health insurers, hospitals, doctors, and drug companies have a special responsibility to choose consultants and attorneys

who are not also protecting the well-being of cigarette and spitting tobacco manufacturers; whether naively or cynically, health groups have a conflict of interest when they hire representatives for the tobacco industry.

"Such lobbyists, attorneys, and other consultants create a smokescreen in Congress by showing up one day representing a hospital and the next day a maker of snuff," said Eric Solberg, executive director of DOC. "They're playing both sides, and the public loses."