

Columbus Citizen-Journal

SATURDAY, MARCH 17, 1979

500 who do care

Doctors take on the hucksters

By MARILYN GREENWALD
Citizen-Journal Staff Writer

Dr. Alan Blum is waging an all-out campaign against what he considers the nation's leading cause of disease: Madison Avenue.

In fact, if it were up to him, all cigarette advertising and promotion would go up in smoke, solving what he says is the nation's biggest health threat.

"We're not finger-waggers — we've gone beyond that," said Blum of Doctors Ought to Care, a 500-member group of doctors of which he is founder and president. DOC is a national organization which stresses preventive health care.

Blum, 30, started DOC in Miami in 1977, and when he is not campaigning for DOC, he is a teaching fellow in family medicine at the University of Miami School of Medicine. He spoke in Columbus last week to members of the OSU College of Medicine's Family Practice Group.

The specialty of DOC is beating cigarette advertisers at their own game by designing billboards, magazine advertisements and commercials which parody traditional cigarette advertisements.

"I smoke for smell," is the caption under one ad depicting a strong, handsome man who stands against a woody setting.

"You've coughed up long enough baby," says another ad which parodies a popular advertising slogan.

But, Blum said, DOC is more than simply an anti-smoking organization. "We're not anti-smoking," he said. "To say that misses the point. Cigarette pushers, alcohol pushers are anti-health, and are particularly against

youth. They want the market very badly and we want it just as bad."

Blum says most of the doctors who donate their time to DOC are young. "Older doctors are skeptical," he said. "We always get the same answers from them — 'we've been telling people about that (smoking hazards) for years. What more can we do?'"

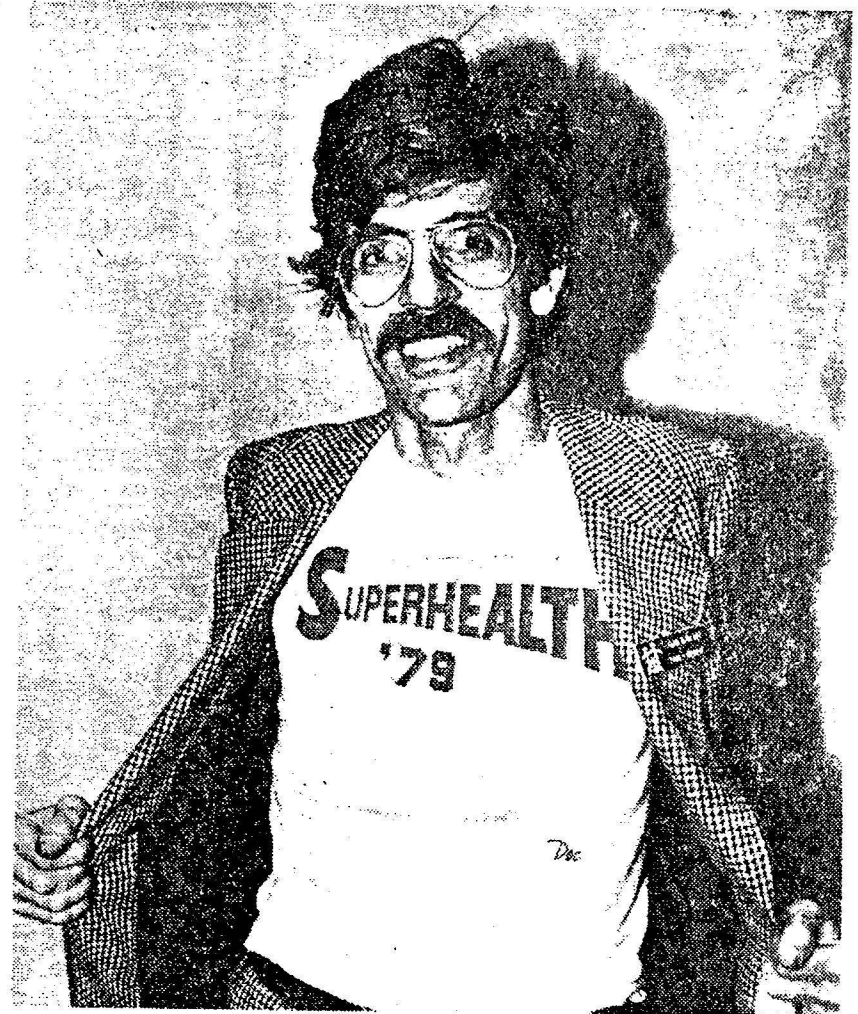
He suggests doctors can help the DOC cause simply by keeping in their waiting rooms magazines which contain no cigarette advertising. "I've determined the average American sees one cigarette ad every five to 10 minutes if he's outside his home," he said.

But members of DOC apparently think a lot more can be done. "We're trying to tell people how ripped off they are," Blum said. "We're looking at Madison Avenue. The ads say low tar. What is tar? It's poison. Would you buy a loaf of bread with only three milligrams poison? And what is a milligram? What does the filter do?"

The doctor has been known to stir up some controversy. His suggestion newspapers "study" cigarette ads before printing them to see if they're misleading prompted medical students to picket in support outside the offices of a Miami newspaper.

And his comments about certain charitable organizations would probably enrage many. "They're just a bunch of socialites," he said. "All they do is pass out pamphlets. Nowhere do they stress prevention." He added the charities do not attempt to inform young people about disease.

"We're trying to show the public doctors aren't malpractitioners or miracle workers," Blum said. "We're putting our money where our mouth is."



Dr. Alan Blum