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DOC smoke signals promote healthy lifestyle

By KARL HILL
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At first glance, it looks like an advertisement for a popular cigarette: The model, a macho man any young male would admire, glares at the reader with steely eyes that radiate self-assurance and manliness.

But his cigarette, oddly, is stuffed up one of his nostrils, and the message is not that the cigarette tastes good. "I smoke for smell," the macho man says.

It is, the astute reader will have gathered by now, an anti-smoking poster. But rather than sound the usual warning, that cigarette smoking can lead to cancer, the poster takes a subtler, gently mocking tact. Smoking, it implies, is a smelly habit.

The poster and other similar ones are part of a public-information campaign launched by a group of young South Carolina doctors who

decided they should do more about preventable health problems than treat the end result.

If the No. 1 cause of preventable deaths in the United States — the cigarette — is also one of the country's most heavily advertised products, they felt, doctors ought to care.

And if the most common method of contraception among teen-agers is luck, doctors ought to care about that, too.

So the approximately 150 family practice residents in the state founded an organization called DOC — for Doctors Ought to Care — with the goal of fostering more healthful attitudes and lifestyles, particularly among young people.

"We're concerned about the things people can control," said Dr. Harmon Patrick, a resident at Greenville's Center for Family Medicine and the man in charge of DOC activities in Greenville.

"We can treat the aftereffects, but the message we want to get across

is, 'Hey, these are things you have some control over, so how about stopping and thinking about it.'"

The people Patrick and his colleagues want most to stop and think are teen-agers, who have yet to develop the habits that could bring them unnecessary problems, so the program is geared mostly to junior high and high school audiences.

In Spartanburg, the pilot city for the project, DOC volunteers spoke to about 8,000 students last year on topics ranging from alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse to nutrition, venereal disease and teen-age pregnancies.

This year the project is gearing up in Greenville. Later it is expected to spread to other cities that have family practice residency programs — Anderson, Columbia and Charleston.

The doctors avoid preaching to their young audiences, striving instead to provide straight-from-the-shoulder information. "We try not to

be parental," Patrick said. "We try to be frank and get people to realize they have to be responsible for making their own decisions. And we try to change peer pressure some, because that's the only way to affect teen-agers."

The program does not ignore adults, though, and the doctors are not shy about prodding the establishment — including the medical establishment — when they see a need for change.

"We did a survey among hospitals in the state to find out which ones had cigarettes for sale," Patrick said. "We found that about 46 percent of them did. We have asked them to consider discontinuing it, and we've gotten pretty good response. All we're saying is, we should not be selling these things in hospitals."

DOC's anti-cigarette campaign is not always welcomed in a state where tobacco is a \$200 million annual crop, Patrick said. "But the

cost of the consequences of smoking is about \$300 million, not to mention the death and suffering," he added.

That's just the South Carolina figure. Nationally, he said, the cost of treating the effects of smoking totaled about \$30 billion in 1977, or 12 percent of all medical costs for the year.

One of the reasons a program like DOC is needed, Patrick said, is that daily life is almost saturated with advertisements portraying the use of tobacco and alcohol as glamorous and romantic.

The 10 most-advertised products in the United States in 1977 were five brands of cigarettes, two over-the-counter drug products, two soft drinks and a beer, he said.

To counter that, DOC has produced off-beat radio spots and mock advertisements such as the "I smoke for taste" poster. Taking a cue from Miami, where the DOC concept originated, the South Caro-

lina group did not attempt to obtain billboard space for its messages.

In Miami, Patrick said, billboard companies at first were receptive to the idea of public-service messages sponsored by DOC. But when they learned that the messages would be anti-cigarette, he said, "they said, 'How about calling somebody else.'"

As an alternative, DOC turned to bus-stop benches for its messages touting "Tarboro" cigarettes and "Country Fresh Arsenic."

Although smoking gets a lot of DOC's attention, Patrick said the group is concerned about all preventable health problems, including alcohol and drug abuse, poor nutrition, teen-age pregnancies, venereal disease and common diseases that can be prevented by immunization.

In talks before school groups, the doctors confront the issues, sensitive though some may be, squarely.

"The main method of contraception (See DOC, p. 6-B)

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tion among teen-agers is luck," Patrick said. "Mostly, the kids are just not educated and they don't have anybody to ask. We hope to do something about that."

The doctors seek parental consent before their sex-education talks, even inviting parents to come along with their children, and the program has been so well received in Spartanburg that "we've almost taken over the role of teaching sex education there," he said.

Patrick said the DOC program has been financed by a \$5,000 grant from the American Academy of Family Practice and a \$5,000 contribution from a beer distributor who asked to remain anonymous.

"But we're down to about \$1,500 now, so we're out looking for more funds," he said. "We hope we can get more money through corporations and individuals."

Anyone interested in contributing to or learning more about the tax-exempt organization can write Patrick at the Center for Family Medicine, 701 Grove Road, Greenville, S.C. 29605.