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Physician urges med students to fight smoking ads with ads

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IOWA CITY, IA. — A picture showing a billboard with a pack of cigarettes and the caption, "Country Fresh Salem," flashed on the screen in front of the 250 persons in the banquet room.

A similar picture, this one on a bus stop bench, appeared on the screen with the caption, "Country Fresh Arsenic." The crowd roared with laughter.

Taste and Smell

The speaker, Dr. Alan Blum, from Chicago, pressed a button, and another picture appeared, showing a macho man with a cigarette hanging from his mouth.

"I smoke for taste," the caption said.

Another picture appeared. "I smoke for smell," said the caption.

This time, the man had a cigarette hanging out of his nose.

The crowd, composed mostly of University of Iowa medical students,

again roared with laughter.

Other pictures and other captions followed.

"You've coughed long enough, baby."

"Arctic Lights. Arctic Lungs. Guaranteed to make you cool as a corpse."

Blum's message during his speech at an Iowa Family Practice Physicians Club meeting here last week was simple:

"Advertising in the tobacco industry is as advanced as any esoteric surgical procedure known to doctors," Blum said. "Advertising is the leading form of education, and it's not used enough by the medical profession."

Blum, who admits to being a super-health addict, is president of a physician-led organization called DOC, Doctors Ought to Care. The two-year-old group is involved in an innovative rebuttal to the advertising of the

tobacco industry as a means of promoting good health.

Tar Poison

Advertising of cigarettes never contains definitions of words, Blum said. He gave "low tar" claims as an example.

"Tar is a poison," Blum said. "Would you go into a grocery store and buy a can of soup with only four ounces of poison in it?"

"We're not anti-smoking — we're anti-heart disease."

Addiction to cigarettes "is an epidemic we no longer can afford to overlook," he said, adding that 350,000 persons die every year as the result of smoking.

"Half of the hospitals in the country still sell cigarettes," he said. "Only one out of four physicians are telling their patients — don't do it."

Cigarettes themselves are about a hundred years old, he said, and emerged in response to the passage of

local anti-spitting ordinances (against snuff dipping and tobacco chewing). Early cigarette advertising stressed no throat irritations, no coughing and better digestion, Blum said.

There were ad statements such as, "I'm your friend." And there were questions such as, "Do you inhale?" Even Santa Claus was shown smoking a Lucky Strike.

Ads Used Doctors

Then, said Blum, the tobacco industry decided to become friends with physicians. "More doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette," stated an advertisement. Another said: "Nose and throat specialists suggest Phillip Morris."

"The tobacco industry has used us, and they care little about our patients," Blum said. "Don't talk in abstracts to your patients. Tell them that for 80 cents (a pack), they're getting 5 cents worth of sugar and some chemicals."

In the 1960s, cigarette advertising was banned from radio and television. Cigarette companies asked for the ban, Blum said, because anti-smoking advertisements on TV and radio were causing a decline in sales.

Blum encouraged the future physicians to help patients in the battle against cigarette addiction.

"There are ways to approach patients," Blum said. "You will gain the admiration and respect of patients if you take an extra five minutes with your patients."