


Eckerd Drugs: "Fault!"

BASF presents



Compete for a chance to play in the Eckerd Tennis Open (A Virginia Slims Championship Series). See store for details.

by Rick Richards, MD

At first glance it seemed like a parody. The newspaper advertisement announced that Eckerd Drug Stores is offering a chance for its customers to play in the Virginia Slims Tennis Series. The advertisement also suggested that the reader visit their nearest store to find out how to win. And how might that be? A "scratch & win" game card with each bronchodilator prescription for all those who have faithfully used Virginia Slims? Or perhaps a blood pressure bingo game: 210/90 qualifies you for the *last match*? But the advertisement is dead serious. Eckerd Drug is now one of the sponsors on the Virginia Slims circuit.

Eckerd's endorsement of a tobacco company makes a mockery of another of its campaigns, "Teach Your Children Well", an anti-drug abuse program designed to help parents talk with their children about drug experimentation and use. A spokesman for PRIDE (Parent's Resource Institute on Drug Education) which is helping to coordinate the effort is quoted in *American Pharmacy* as saying the reason Eckerd's program is important is because it helps parents teach teenagers "to contend with external pressure and advice systems that entice kids to try them (illegal drugs)." What greater enticement is there for a teenager to try tobacco (which, incidentally, is an "illegal drug" for minors in most states) than to see their favorite rich and famous sports figure with a cigarette dangling from his or her lip in an attempt to look sexy or macho? Through sponsorship of events like the Virginia Slims Tennis Tournament, Eckerd is supporting the very "advice system" which it claims it is fighting against. Ironically, although tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in this country, 25% of tobacco products are purchased in pharmacies. (Eight percent of all drug store profits come from tobacco; and tobacco ranks fourth among all products sold in pharmacies and other pharmacy chains such as Walgreens and Peoples [which is owned by Imperial Tobacco].)

If officials at Eckerd are genuinely concerned with the health of the nation's youth--indeed, with the health of all of their customers--they will remove all tobacco products from their shelves and cease to sponsor events of any kind which are linked to the tobacco industry.

DOC appreciates the efforts which pharmacists are making to educate parents and teenagers about illegal drug use. The decision by Eckerd's to continue to sell cigarettes is a corporate one without the endorsement of mainstream pharmacists. Therefore, physicians should assist their fellow health care professionals in the effort to restore the image of the professional pharmacist currently being tarnished by chain executives who put corporate profits above their customers' health.

Physicians should do three things:

- 1) Write or telephone Stuart Turtley, President, and let him know how inconsistent Eckerd's promotion of the Virginia Slims Tennis Tournament is with their current drug abuse campaign, and that you feel it is unethical for a drug store to sell tobacco products. (Eckerd Drug Company, ATTN: President's Office, P.O. Box 4689, Clearwater, FL 33518, 813-736-5686).
- 2) Talk with your local pharmacist about the mixed messages your patients receive when they buy prescription products at drugstores that sell tobacco.
- 3) Encourage your patients to patronize only drugstores that really care about their health and show it by refusing to sell tobacco products. Why not stamp or pre-print your prescription pads with "Please have this filled at a drugstore that cares about your health and doesn't sell tobacco."?

(See Richards JW, Blum A: Pharmacists who dispense cigarettes. *New York State Journal of Medicine* 1985; 85:350-353. Also, Finkelstein G: Tobacco Products = O.U.T. *New Jersey Journal Pharmacy* 1987 (1): 5-6.)

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cluding some who are members of APA, are in favor of such advertising because their livelihoods depend upon the tobacco industry. Probably these people are very much in the minority, but I would regard it as dangerous in the extreme to use numbers as a reason for infringing on freedom of choice and expression. These observations leave me convinced that the opinions of our readers provide no strong basis for changing our advertising policy in ways that would eliminate tobacco advertising from *Psychology Today*...

".. The discouraging feature of most of the letters I receive criticizing the ads in *Psychology Today* is that they treat the benefit side of the ledger as though it has no value. For some of the critics perhaps informing the public actually has no value. For everyone else it seems to me that an objective accounting shows that *Psychology Today*--even with the offensive ads included--is one of the best things psychology has going for it in the promotion of its own best interest..."

Because of its acceptance of tobacco advertising and avoidance of free and open coverage of the health problems associated with smoking and its promotion, *Psychology Today* has never appeared on DOC's list of recommended magazines for the office waiting room. DOC members are urged to bring the APA's unseemly relationship with the tobacco industry to the attention of psychologist colleagues and to write or call the APA to express their concern with this issue.

American Psychological Association
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