

# Anti-smoking group sending 'obituaries'

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When members of Congress tell voters to keep them posted on developments back home, likely very few envision the kinds of messages they receive from a Houston physician and members of his organization.

Dr. Alan Blum is founder of an anti-smoking physicians' group that has started a campaign in which doctors send black-bordered "obituary postcards" to members of Congress when one of their constituents dies of a tobacco-related illness.

Blum, founder and chairman of Doctors Ought to Care (DOC), recently moved to Houston and he thinks the postcards serve a serious purpose.

"Congress shouldn't call for health care cost control and then pass legislation which supports the tobacco industry," Blum says.

"We're trying to make the connection between the image of the macho man in the cigarette ads and the death of the family man in the hospital," he adds.

Blum maintains Congress needs



**BLUM:**  
Aim serious

to be reminded of the estimated 360,000 tobacco-related deaths per year in the United States and the role cigarette advertising and federal subsidies play in those deaths.

"Congress needs to know it is promoting the production and sale of an addictive drug," he says.

The idea for the cards originated in England when British Medical Association members sent notices to members of Parliament when a constituent died of such a disease.

The physician sending the card writes the deceased's name on the card and then checks which disease caused the death. The diseases listed are lung cancer, chronic obstructive lung disease, coronary heart disease or other tobacco-related cancer or vascular disease.

It then advises the congressman that next time he is approached by a representative of the tobacco industry requesting support for some bill that would benefit the industry he or she should "keep this death in mind as you consider whether or not to support this legislation."

DOC was founded 10 years ago by Blum, newly appointed director of health promotion in the department of family medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. The group has about 3,500 physician members, although Blum says only several hundred of the cards have been sent to members as of last week.