

Cigarette foe enlists other doctors in fight

By Jo Griffiths
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Dr. Alan Blum records six hours of television every Sunday afternoon.

It's not because he's a sports enthusiast and is afraid of missing the games.

Actually, it's because he really dislikes cigarette advertising. Sunday afternoon TV, according to Blum, is saturated with cigarette promotions: the Virginia Slims tennis tournament, Vantage golf tournament, Marlboro and Camel auto racing contests, for example.

Take your pick, he says: They're all in the name of tobacco, which contributes to more deaths and illness every year than Blum likes to think about.

That's why he and another physician co-founded DOC, or Doctors Ought to Care, a group of physicians who emphasize health promotion and prevention in their practices.

Blum also is an outspoken advocate of anti-smoking efforts in this country and worldwide. Not many people dislike cigarettes more than he does, and not too many people are doing as much as he is to get them eliminated.

"There is no more profitable commodity [in this country] than cigarettes," said Blum, who is assistant professor and coordinator of patient education and health promotion with Baylor College of Medicine's Department of Family Medicine. "Every state is a tobacco state."

Blum was at Polyclinic yesterday to talk to the medical center's family practice physicians

— and some Hershey Medical Center physicians and medical students — about the tobacco industry's pervasive hold on Americans. He arrived late and breezed through his talk, pulling laughter from his audience with his anecdotes and humorous slides.

The tobacco industry has invaded nearly every aspect of American society, Blum said, from the selling of fruit to the media. For years, advertisers successfully have connected smoking with the "good life" — money, power, youth, and fame.

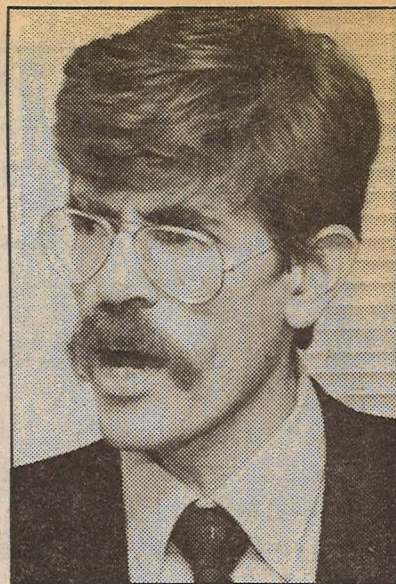
"Looks, sex, and money matter far more than health," Blum said. "Advertisers know that."

The prevalence of stubborn myths such as that smoking relieves stress or keeps one from gaining weight also has kept the industry alive and well, Blum said, and the media haven't helped much, either.

"Once a year they talk about the Great American Smokeout," Blum said, blasting the media for what he called journalistic complacency. "They take the [tobacco industry's] money and run the rest of the year. Newspapers know right from wrong. They choose wrong."

Blum said there are trends in the tobacco industry today that are outpacing medicine's efforts to block cigarette production and use. Those trends are hard to fight, he said, but doctors have to make up their minds to do just that.

"What we [doctors] are doing now [in smoking clinics] is grabbing people while they're drowning," Blum said. "We're not going to the headwaters."



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Dr. Alan Blum
"Every state a tobacco state"

He urged physicians to start focusing on images instead of medical facts in dealing with smoking patients. Most people buy only one brand of cigarettes, which has a special meaning for them, he said. Undermining that symbol can help break the habit.

DOC's approach, Blum said, has been to use a combination of fear, humor and anger. Hence, Virginia Slims' "You've come a long way baby" became "You coughed up a long time, baby." The Marlboro man became the "barfboro" man. Benson & Hedges became "Benson and heart attacks."

Blum speaks with pride of DOC's recent wresting of sponsorship of the U.S. boomerang team's trip to Australia away from the country's number one cigarette manufacturer, the Philip Morris Co. Team members, he said, will become advocates for DOC.