

# BMJ

SATURDAY 28 SEPTEMBER 1991



BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL NO 6805 VOLUME 303

INTERNATIONAL

## Editorials

- 729 **Angioplasty and restenosis**  
Adrian J B Brady, John B Warren
- 730 **Hypertension and non-insulin dependent diabetes**  
John S Yudkin
- 732 **Addressing the most important preventable cause of death**  
Ronald M Davis, Richard Smith
- 733 **Women in general practice**  
Jacky Hayden
- 734 **WIST-ful thinking**  
Luisa Dillner

## News

- 735-740 **Pensioners must pay for themselves · New Zealand doctors threaten strikes · Patients' charter · Reforming prisons · Public health alliance for Europe · Cost of dying in Monmouth · Research strategy · Pre-election battles · BMJ launches tobacco journal · Clinical academic staff run out of patience · Triazolam again**

## Papers

- 741 **Parkinson's disease as community health problem: study in Norwegian nursing homes**  
J P Larsen and the Norwegian Study Group of Parkinson's Disease in the Elderly
- 744 **The Dundee coronary risk-disk for management of change in risk factors**  
Hugh Tunstall-Pedoe
- 748 **An action plan for preventing coronary heart disease in primary care**  
Working Group of the Coronary Prevention Group and the British Heart Foundation
- 750 **Unemployment rates: an alternative to the Jarman index?**  
Doreen A Campbell, John M C Radford, Paul Burton
- 755 **Risk factors for developing non-insulin dependent diabetes: a 10 year follow up of men in Uppsala**  
Einar T Skarforos, K Ingemar Selinus, Hans O Lithell
- 760 **Compulsive personality as predictor of response to serotonergic antidepressants**  
Marc Anseau, Benoit Troisfontaines, Patrick Papart, Remy von Frenckell
- 761 **Doctors and drops**  
G Gallagher, I Mackay

## General Practice

- 762 **Employment experiences of vocationally trained doctors**  
Kay Osler

## Education & Debate

- 765 **The New NHS: six months on: The Fre**  
Jeremy Laurance
- 766 **The Health of the Nation: responses**  
**Alcohol as a key area**  
Peter Anderson
- 769 **Role of diabetes**  
K G M M Alberti
- 772 **Lesson of the Week: Late complications of undetected urethral child**  
M A Johnston, D A Hughes, A F Azmy
- 773 **Human listeriosis and pate: a possible association**  
J McLauchlin, S M Hall, S K Velani, R J Gilbert
- 776 **ABC of Vascular Diseases: Leg ulcers**  
E L Gilliland, John H N Wolfe

- 780-796 **Obituary · Correspondence · Medicopolitical Digest · Soundings · Medicine and the Media · Personal View · Medicine and Books · Minerva · (in detail overleaf)**

## MEDICINE AND THE MEDIA

Look After Your Heart International Conference, London.

### Make 'em laugh

**D**r Alan Blum knows the value of making people laugh. At the Look After Your Heart 1991 international conference in London last week he had 300 delegates from 22 countries smiling, chuckling, and then roaring for more. But his humour had a serious message. Health campaigners should shift their attention away from smokers on to the people who make and market cigarettes. Using satire and ridicule, he intends to "laugh the pushers out of town."

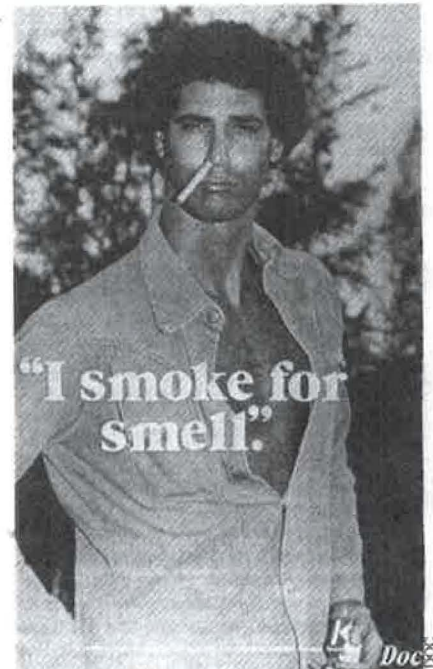
Since setting up DOC (Doctors Ought to Care) in 1987 Dr Blum has been making people laugh at the expense of the tobacco industry at meetings across America and now across the Atlantic. His highly polished act has become an essential part of any conference on smoking and health.

Despite sharing a platform with the chairman of the Health Education Authority, Sir Donald Maitland, and the coordinator of the American Pawtucket Heart Health pro-

gramme, Dr Craig Lefebvre (who had earlier reported the success of his community based project), Dr Blum, a family physician in Texas, admitted to having little faith in health education campaigns. He likened current antismoking campaigns to spraying the room of a malaria victim with DDT. "There are no quit clinics for malaria," he said. "Smoking is a parasitic disease. We should find the host species and the parasite that lives in it and drain the swamps."

He believes that there is little point in lecturing people about their health. Tobacco advertisers have recognised that health comes a poor second to looks, sex, and money in young people's list of priorities. Preaching, pamphleteering, and putting warning signs on advertisements are, he believes, ineffective when pitched against the financial might and media skills of the tobacco industry. "Health educators are too nice," he said. "It's time to take off the gloves and fight"; we should use the tobacco industry's own favourite tools—"magazine ads, billboards, and TV."

Four years after buying its first piece of advertising space, on a billboard outside the offices of Marlboro in Texas, DOC has grown from a small group of doctors into a national network with 8000 members in the United States and growing links around the world. It



"Health educators are too nice. It's time to take off the gloves and fight."

has recently become affiliated to a pressure group in Britain called Doctors for the Tobacco Law, and Dr Blum hopes that satirical counteradvertisements will soon be appearing in the United Kingdom.

The voluntary agreements on tobacco advertising on television were not working, he said, and government ministers who defend them were "wilfully ignorant of reality." Tobacco companies admitted to sponsoring 3000 separate sporting events in the United States last year, and each weekend American television transmits eight to 12 hours of sport that advertises tobacco, he said. DOC has offered free psychological counselling to all tobacco company executives. The offer has been refused.

The idea that there is no advertising for tobacco on television is just one of the myths surrounding cigarettes that Dr Blum wants to explode. Another is that cigarette con-

sumption is falling. This may be true for high earning Americans, he said, but smoking is on the increase among women and ethnic minorities in the United States and among people in eastern Europe, where tobacco companies are already finding fresh harvests of young people. We had heard earlier from Dr John Roberts of the World Health Organisation's tobacco and health programme that the new clock in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, was donated by Marlboro.

Dr Blum's ire extends to the pharmaceutical and chemical companies that supply flavouring for cigarettes, pesticides and fertilisers for tobacco growers, and cellophane for wrappings, and to newspapers and magazines which are, he said, "in bed with the tobacco industry." *Time* magazine, which is widely circulated to schools in America, advertises its own advertising space as suitable for promoting tobacco.

Dr Blum, recently appointed as news editor of the *BMJ* publishing group's new journal *Tobacco Control* (see p 739), is an unashamed and successful media manipulator. The delegates, boosted by the injection of humour, flocked up to the podium after his talk and left with fistfuls of stickers. One of these, designed to be slapped on the cover of offending magazines, sports a well known brand image embedded in a no smoking sign and reads: "Many of the ads in this publication are misleading, deceptive and/or a rip off. For example, smoking does not make one glamorous, macho, successful, or athletic. It does make one sick, poor and dead."—FIONA GODLEE, *BMJ*

Contact addresses: DOC (Doctors Ought to Care), 5510 Greenbriar, Suite 235, Houston, TX 77005, USA; Doctors for the tobacco Law, c/o Professor John Moxham, British Thoracic Society, 1 St Andrews Place, London NW1 4LB, 071 486 7766.