

# Cigarette ad exhibit tracks health claims, endorsements

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News staff writer

Laughter and amazement are common responses to the exhibit, "When 'More Doctors Smoke Camels' ... A Century of Health Claims in Cigarettes."

After all, it now seems preposterous for a physician or scientist to endorse a particular brand of cigarette for its health benefits.

But such endorsements were concocted regularly in tobacco advertisements throughout the 20th Century, and there's a sobering ending for the tiny exhibit of 25 print ads stretching down a corridor at the Alabama Museum of the Health Sciences at UAB's Reynold's Historical Library.

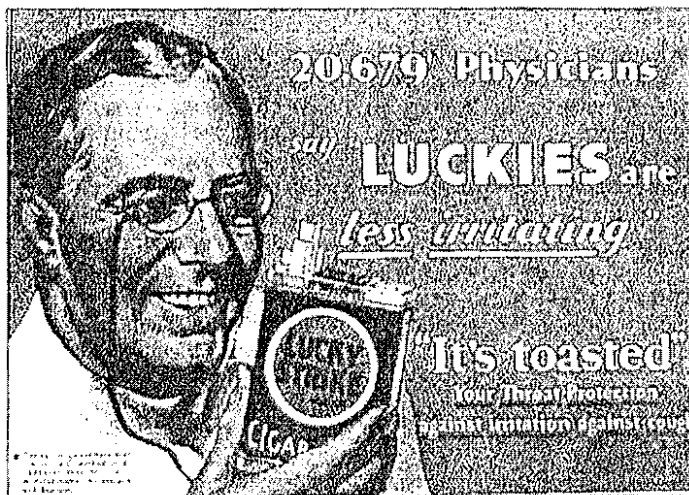
The exhibit's finale is an advertisement for a new brand of cigarettes, Omni Vector Tobacco is marketing the brand with the claim that it is the "first reduced carcinogen cigarette." Retail sales are expected to start this month.

"It's the same baloney," said Dr. Alan Blum, professor of family medicine and director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. "You can't smoke safely, period."

When told about Blum's comments, a spokeswoman for Omni said, "The company feels it's been very direct, and the ad speaks for itself."

Omni's ad features "An Open Letter to American Smokers" from Bennett LeBow, CEO of Vector Tobacco. The letter concedes that Omni has not been proven to lower the risk of cancer, but it also says:

"As we all know, smoking is addictive and hazardous to your health. However, the medical community has identified specific carcinogens that are a major cause of lung cancer in smokers. In a groundbreaking move, we have greatly reduced many of these. Let me be perfectly clear — there is no such thing as a safe cigarette, and we



SPECIAL/CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF TOBACCO AND SOCIETY

This Lucky Strike ad is part of the exhibit "When 'More Doctors Smoke Camels' ... A Century of Health Claims in Cigarettes."

*"It's all a game. It's like somebody jumping off the 40th floor of a building instead of the 45th floor."*

**Dr. Alan Blum**

*Professor of family medicine and director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa*

do not encourage anyone to smoke. But, we strongly believe that if you do smoke, Omni is the best alternative."

Blum, who supplied ads in the exhibit from a large collection at his center, said decades of tobacco industry advertising have convinced the public that some types of cigarettes are safer than others.

"It's all a game," he said. "It's like somebody jumping off the 40th floor of a building instead of the 45th floor."

Perhaps the best example is the marketing of filtered cigarettes, which people now believe are safer than non-filtered cigarettes. But most people don't

know that early cigarette filters were made from asbestos, and studies have shown that people who use filtered cigarettes smoke more than people who smoke non-filtered cigarettes, he said.

"It's all a big hoax," Blum said.

Indeed, the old advertisements on display at the University of Alabama at Birmingham are outrageous, in hindsight. For instance, a Lucky Strike ad campaign was based upon a claim that thousands of physicians had endorsed the cigarettes as "less irritating to sensitive or tender throats." The ads, which began in the 1920s, even appeared in medical journals. Similar ads were developed for Camel cigarettes and boasted that "More Doctors Smoke Camels."

*The exhibit runs through Jan. 31 on the third floor of Lister Hill Library for the Health Sciences, 1700 University Blvd.*