

the SCOPE

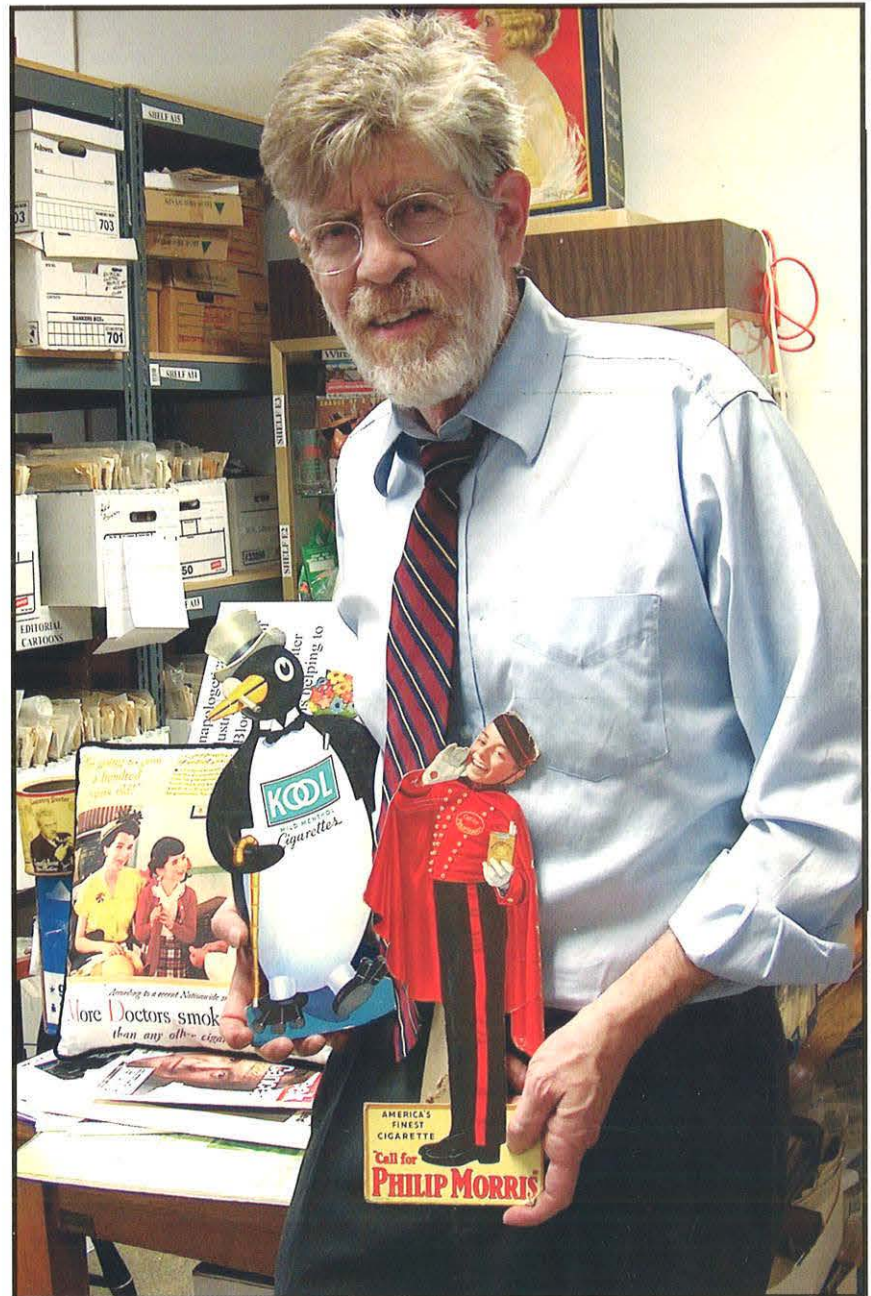
Of Family Medicine

The official publication of the Alabama Academy of Family Physicians

**Meet one of
the tobacco
industry's
most
intractable
foes:**

Alan Blum, M.D.

Director, the University of
Alabama Center for the
Study of Tobacco and Society



Also in this issue:

- Medical Students talk about their future in family medicine
- ALSO course coming to Huntsville in July
- Chapter member John Wheat, M.D. garners national recognition

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Cover Story- the University of Alabama's Alan Blum, M.D. has spent his career teaching family medicine and bedeviling the tobacco industry. This man of conscience talks about his four-decade crusade to mute the influence of "the merchants of death." Page 8

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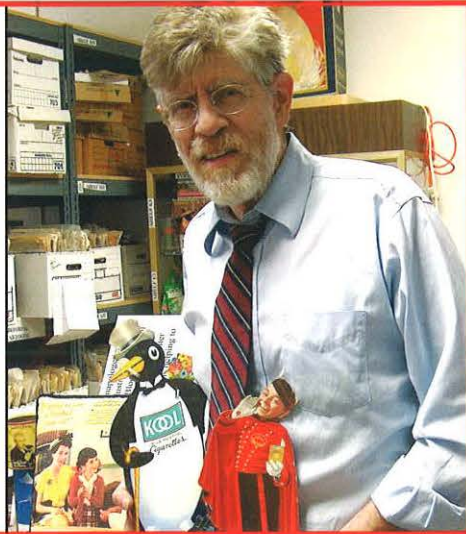
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Meet one of the tobacco industry's most intractable

foes:

Alan Blum, M.D.
Director, the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society



“For more than 70 years, every report on the dangers of cigarette smoking was disputed by the tobacco industry, who claimed more research was needed and who promised to identify and remove any component of smoke that was found to cause disease.” That's the assessment presented to a U.S. Senate hearing earlier this year by Alabama Academy member Alan Blum, M.D. FAAFP, professor and Gerald Leon Wallace Endowed Chair in Family Medicine at the University of Alabama, in Tuscaloosa.

Dr. Blum is a highly regarded medical educator, but perhaps his greatest passion is in serving as the director of the University's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. As such, he is continuing a literal lifetime of interest in tobacco, and its devastating effects on people and society.

When he was still a little kid growing up in Queens, New York, Dr. Blum was encouraged by his family physician father to begin col-

lecting tobacco advertisements and memorabilia. Years before the famous surgeon general's report on the dangers of tobacco, the senior Blum had recognized the terrible toll taken by smoking. That was in the late 1950s, when every major league baseball team had a cigarette sponsor. Today, Dr. Blum has amassed the largest collection of tobacco related historical material at any university; it includes the oldest book on tobacco in existence. His inventory of ads, promotional items, posters, editorial cartoons, and promotional giveaways from the industry now fills 2,500 archive boxes. And it's growing.

When he arrived at Emory University School of Medicine in the mid 1970s, Dr. Blum figured the medical people he would come into contact with would be heavily involved in tobacco education, and in actively working to counteract the industry's sales and propaganda efforts. Not so. "During four years of med school, I had just one half of one lecture on smoking," he says. That startling realization prompted him to look for ways for medicine to effectively combat Big Tobacco's incredibly successful

marketing and public relations efforts.

As an attendee at the 1977 American Academy of Family Physicians National Conference of Family Practice Residents, he attempted to announce the formation of a new organization whose purpose was to strap on the gloves and duke it out with the industry. He was denied the microphone. But AAFP staffer Dan Ostergaard, M.D. found a room Dr. Blum could use, and about 50 interested residents gathered and heard his message. Before the meeting was over, most of the board of directors of Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) was in place, and the legendary anti-tobacco industry organization began a 25-year adventure of protest and public education.

From its inception, DOC chose zany satire and a humorous Mad Magazine approach to telling the truth about tobacco and the industry dedicated to promoting its use. They employed billboards, counter-advertising, t-shirts, and biting spoofs to make their points. "We created the Benson & Heart Attack Film Festival, taking a jab at the Benson & Hedges Film Festival. At several medical schools we hosted an Emphysema Slims Tennis Tournament and dressed up a football player in women's tennis garb and called him/her Martina Nosmokeanova." On another occasion DOC countered Philip Morris' "Miller Lite: We're Having a Party" event with one of their own entitled, "Killer Lite: We're Pushing a Drug." T-shirts pictured a man throwing up into a toilet with the inscription "They're having a party; we're grabbing a potty." Most folks laughed and got

the message. Not surprisingly, the industry usually didn't appreciate the joke, and there were lawsuits from time to time. There is still a traveling counter-promotion in Oregon called the Barfboro Barfbmobile that spoofs the Marlboro Adventure Team and highlights the association between smoking and sports.

DOC also created the original Tar Wars program, now operated by the American Academy of Family Physicians. Dr. Blum grew disillusioned with what he believes is a watered down version of the program. He wants the program to be more hard hitting, and to place greater emphasis on targeting the industry, and not just the harmful impact of its products. He strongly believes that its not just tobacco that kills; it's also the industry behind the product that needs to be held accountable.



From the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society's collection: typical industry promotion gimmicks- if doctors smoke, it must be ok!

Dr. Blum is not just someone who enjoys standing in the parking lot and throwing stones at the industry headquarters building. He's often worked through traditional avenues to fight Big Tobacco, but, he says, "They move soooo slooowly, and so fearfully. I think I can make more of an impact by using non traditional approaches." For

instance, for 20 years he has attended most of the annual shareholder meetings of Philip Morris (now Altria), where he asks pointed questions and introduces stockholder resolutions. He once even ran for a seat on their board of directors! Surprisingly, a former colleague who works in the tobacco business says the industry respects his views, even if they probably dread seeing him rise to speak.

As the Bible says, it does no good to light your lamp and place it under a basket. So taking the University's collections on the road has been a major goal of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. Dr. Blum has amassed over 1,000 editorial cartoons, and has created an exhibition that has been on view at museums and libraries in Alabama, Kentucky, Washington, Nebraska, New York, and Washington D.C. The exhibition's year-long run at the National Museum of Health and Medicine was profiled in a recent issue of the American Medical Association's *AM News*.

The years of work he's committed in the anti-tobacco fight have not muted his considerable missionary zeal. He decries the recent Philip Morris smoking cessation campaign, "Quit Assist," which was recently mailed to the nation's physicians. He calls it a shameless attempt by the industry to both curry favor and to blur the line between genuine and bogus smoking cessation. And he calls the current attempt by Congress to empower the FDA to regulate tobacco nothing more than the "Marlboro Protection Act," since it grandfathers-out existing brands

from regulation. Marlboro, as he points out, already has an industry-dominating 40% plus share of the market, and the proposed legislation will do nothing to reverse that. He is disappointed that the American Academy of Family Physicians is supporting the bill, and says instead that what is needed is a more effective approach, with real teeth, that does not protect such a major player in the business.

Dr. Blum's dedication to the cause has ruffled feathers over the years, but it also has attracted a lot of attention, including that of Alabama native and former Surgeon General Luther Terry, M.D. Dr. Terry was the author of the seminal 1964 report that stripped some of the veil of deceit from the industry, and resulted in warnings being placed on tobacco products. The two became friends. Janet Terry, Dr. Terry's widow, became honorary national chair of DOC, as did Dr. Alton Ochsner, considered the pioneering anti-smoking firebrand of the 20th century. On the death of Dr. Terry, Dr. Blum served as a pallbearer at his funeral, having been specifically invited by Janet to the service at Arlington National Cemetery.

Some would call Alan Blum a contrarian and a zealot. But has any change in the history of the world ever been effected without activists of one stripe or another pushing the envelope? "In our lifetime, doctors were able to leave medical conferences with cartons of cigarettes provided by tobacco company exhibitors," he recalls. "That's changed. But there is room for much more change before we can say the fight is over." □