

TOBACCO CONTROL

USA: PHARMACY ITEMS AMONG A MILLION IN COLLECTION

The satirical exhibit “Your cancer and drug store”—see left—is just one manifestation of the career-long passion of Dr Alan Blum, family physician and founder of the US ginger group DoC - Doctors Ought to Care (and first editor of this journal’s News Analysis section). In particular, he has long refused to accept the inconsistency between medical, health and other trusted leaders in society who have an ambivalent attitude to tobacco, including pharmacies which profit from serving the interests of health while at the same time selling tobacco products. In the mid-1990s, Blum saw that a convenience store in Hartford, Connecticut was up for sale, complete with a historic collection: the seller had saved virtually all the cigarette advertising displays and other promotional items used in his shop over the previous 20 years. Blum, long noted for his creative use of satire for education about tobacco, purchased the lot. Thus was born the concept of Your Cancer and Drug Store.

However, the pharmacy ephemera comprises but a fraction of the tobacco related promotional material and other associated items, now numbering more than a million, amassed by Blum. The collection ranges from tobacco-branded advertising signs, sports bags, ash trays, fashion accessories, T-shirts, caps,



USA: the satirical exhibit “My Cancer and Drug Store”, highlighting the inappropriateness of tobacco being sold in some US pharmacies, is seen on show in Buffalo, New York State in 2009, with its creator, Dr Alan Blum and a health promotion colleague, Rebecca Murphy-Hoefer.

cameras, CDs, mugs and other give-away items distributed by tobacco companies with the purchase of cartons or packs of cigarettes and spitting tobacco, to a Philip Morris Supports the Arts sweat-shirt, an infant-sized Virginia Slims Tennis t-shirt, 1940s get-well cards with a cigarette theme, a Philip Morris sign placed at the bedside of hospital patients reminding them not to smoke in bed, an RJ Reynolds sales representative’s book from the 1920s with the same Camel advertisement in more than 50 languages

for placement in neighbourhood stores and ethnic newspapers—the list itself is almost an exhibit of the exploitation of a vast galaxy of promotional tactics to try to ensure that the world smoked as much as possible.

It also includes significant publications that chronicle the history of tobacco control, such as original newspaper headlines on the publication of the Royal College of Physicians of London pioneering report in 1962 and the first Surgeon General’s report in 1964. The significance of these early scientific reports is given added context by the collection’s magazines from the 1950s and 1960s that include planted articles by tobacco companies debunking the dangers of smoking covered by these early reports. Postage stamps alone, collected from all over the world by Louisiana chest physician Dr Jim Lutschg, form such a large sub-collection that selections have already been exhibited separately (see *Tob Control* 2010;19:354).

Now this unique collection is so large, with attendant access and storage restrictions, that Alan Blum and colleagues are searching for a permanent home for it that will allow it to be used by future generations of tobacco control researchers and advocates, as well as those studying the history of medicine, marketing, tobacco control or any other of the many facets of tobacco and disease history that it illuminates. [Enquiries: ablum@cchs.ua.edu]