

'DOC' program helps MDs set healthy example for patients

NEW ORLEANS — A smoking secretary or fat nurse can undo a physician's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles among his or her patients.

Avoidance of such traps is part of what Dr. John W. Richards, Jr. calls a "positive, office waiting-room policy," as national coordinator of a group called Doctors Ought to Care. (DOC)

Dr. Richards, the chief of the family practice clinic at the Eisenhower Army Medical Center in Martinez, GA, was one of those manning one of the most-visited booths at the annual American Academy of Family Physicians meeting here. There, DOC members wore "Superhealth by the year 2000" T-shirts, and displayed a variety of posters and other visuals aimed at discouraging such bad habits as smoking, drinking too much and overeating.

However, Dr. Richards maintained the idea is not to condemn

these activities so much as to be "pro-health." As part of his "positive, office waiting-room policy," for example, he checks reading material. Good articles from popular magazines are put in binders for patients to read. Articles of dubious worth from sensational newspapers are clipped, while a facing page has a reprint of a medical journal article which shows "these articles are just not factual."

Physicians involved in DOC also aim to be good examples of healthy living by maintaining fitness and avoiding the use of abusive substances. Similar standards are also required of the employees of DOC members.

"You can show acquiescence of unhealthy lifestyles through your office staff," he said. "If it's OK for your help, it's OK for your patients."

"There are no ashtrays in the waiting room. "I had a patient with an artificial heart valve who

smokes and I talked him into quitting. Two days later, he came back, and said, 'By the way, do you know my cardiologist smokes?' He started back smoking because he said, 'If it's okay for a cardiologist, it must be okay for me!'"

Dr. Richards said DOC members are using media techniques to combat promotions "of Madison Avenue." He said members use TV and radio spots, satirizing regular commercials for cigarettes, for example, and have sponsored "Emphysema Slims" tennis tournaments. (Virginia Slims is the sponsor for several professional tournaments for women).

Speeches promoting healthy lifestyles have been given to more than 85,000 high-school students, he said, but the newest media blitz may be the hardest.

He added tobacco is a \$200 million a year industry in South Carolina, "but the health-care cost of tobacco in the state is \$300 million."



Dr John Richards