



Alan Blum, MD (right) leads an anti-smoking picket line in Miami.

FEBRUARY 13, 1978



An Informed Membership
Is Our Greatest Strength

American Medical

NEWS

'Killer habits' are targets

Miami physicians take lead in drive to curb cigaret smoking

Physicians who don't inform their patients of the hazards of cigaret smoking commit "nothing short of malpractice," according to Alan Blum, MD.

Dr. Blum, chief resident in the department of family medicine at Jackson Memorial Hospital, is waging a zealous anti-smoking crusade in Miami, Fla.

Last year, Dr. Blum and two other family practitioners—Elliott Podoll, MD, and Betty Widman, MD—formed DOC (Doctors Oughta Care), a grassroots organization to educate the public about the major preventable causes of bad health and premature death.

The organization, which now numbers over 100 Miami health care professionals, is going after cigaret habituation first. Alcohol abuse and poor nutrition are also on their list of "killer habits."

DOC hopes to get its anti-smoking message to Miami residents through an advertising and public relations campaign now under way. Twenty bus benches in Miami now carry one of DOC's clever slogans, such as "Country Fresh Arsenic." DOC members picketed a Benson and Hedges film festival and a Virginia Slims tennis match, carrying placards that included slogans like "A Streetcar Named Emphysema" and "Yes, Virginia, There Is

A Cancer."

But Dr. Blum feels that MDs, through personal, one-to-one teaching, are "the ones most capable of rendering cigaret smoking as socially unacceptable as obesity or spitting."

PATIENT EDUCATION. Dr. Blum believes "is too important to be relegated solely to ancillary personnel, audio-visual paraphernalia, or counter-advertising by public-interest groups.

"Besides," he says, "there is mystical joy in experiencing the patient's unembarrassed appreciation for the doctor's personal commitment and concern. It's amazing how frequently smokers say they have been hoping for an opportunity to review their habit with the physician."

If an MD spends only 30 minutes each day with a pack-and-a-half smoker, the physician will have the opportunity to influence 250 patients who smoke more than 2,500,000 cigarets a year, according to Dr. Blum.

"Encouraging and supporting the patient during subsequent visits takes very little time once the kernel of physician involvement is instilled," he added.

"Adolescents are a tough bunch to talk with about cigarets," Dr. Blum said. "Bar-

raged by violent, sexually suggestive shoot-em-ups and canned-laughter comedy on television, they are often oblivious to their own individuality."

Dr. Blum points out that a two-pack-a-day smoker "invests" with no return, over \$500 a year, or about \$6,000 in ten years, counting inflation and interest.

Cigaret smoking is "not even a time-honored tradition," Dr. Blum said, pointing out that cigarets were not mass-produced until a century ago. Per capita consumption of cigarets last year was 3,000, but was only 25 per person in 1880, he added.

DR. BLUM hopes physicians will dispel the myth that a low-tar, low-nicotine filter cigaret is safer. "Patients who switch to the newer, so-called lighter brands are smoking more, probably to obtain the nicotine they crave," he said.

DOC has an uphill battle against the tobacco industry, which now spends over \$1 million a day in advertising, according to Dr. Blum.

In Miami, for example, almost half of the 1,800 billboards advertise cigarets—adding up to some 5,000 "exposures" per person annually, Dr. Blum estimates.

Although cigarets are no longer advertised on television, the lost revenue seems to have been picked up by the print media, Dr. Blum believes. "A given issue of *Time* magazine may have anywhere between 20% to 80% of its color advertising supplied by the tobacco companies," he said.

The very least a physician can do, Dr. Blum believes, is to remove magazines with cigaret advertising from their waiting rooms. He recommends publications without such advertising, which include *New Yorker*, *Reader's Digest*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *National Geographic*.

To counter the tobacco industry advertising blitz, Dr. Blum suggests that newspapers and other publications publish larger warnings in all cigaret advertising and publish anti-smoking articles that challenge the claims of the cigarets advertising.

"It's one thing for publishers to ignore the facts of health, but quite another to acquiesce in the sale of a carcinogen," Dr. Blum concluded.



Bus bench outside Miami's Papanicolaou institute bears anti-cigaret message of DOC (Doctors Oughta Care).