LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Address correspondence to Editor, New York State Journal of Medicine, 420 Lakeville Road, Lake Success, NY 11042. Letters should be typed double-spaced and include the signature, academic degree, professional affiliation, and address of each author. Preference is given to letters not exceeding 450 words, and every effort will be made to assure prompt publication. All letters are personally acknowledged by the Editor.

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Pesticide residues in cigarettes

TO THE EDITOR: I have read with great interest the December 1983 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine. I feel that you have missed an area concerning tobacco that may offer far more impact for efforts to curtail smoking than anything else.

In his discussion of tobacco-growing, Muller alluded to the use of pesticides. In my experience, I have found that most people are unaware that tobacco is not considered a food crop by the Environmental Protection Agency or the United States Department of Agriculture. This is the result of heavy lobbying by the tobacco industry. The reason for the importance of this action is so that tobacco will not have the requirement of tolerance setting for pesticides that are used on the crop. All food crops that have pesticides used on them require exhaustive feeding studies in residue trials to determine the safe application levels under the labeling that is proposed. This applies to all pesticides of any type used on crops even though the pesticide may have been used one year previous to the planting of the crop. Tobacco, not being a food crop, is not tested for pesticide residues. The only “residue” work done is by the tobacco industry itself to determine if a candidate pesticide has any affect on the flavor testing program. This means that there is no control over pesticide residues in tobacco, including EDB, DDT, dieldrin, parathion, sevin, toxaphene or a host of others. I find this fact appalling and often wonder why, with the environmental hammer so often used on pesticides, pesticide producers, and farmers, no one to my knowledge ever question the amount of pesticide residues in or on tobacco products.

JOHN E. PROCTOR
PO Box 4913
Hawthorn Road
Kansas City, MO 64120

The author works for a company that manufactures agricultural chemicals.


Editor’s note: On March 3, the Associated Press reported from Hartford, Connecticut, that five tobacco growers, including Consolidated Cigar Corporation, were ordered by the state’s Department of Environmental Protection to supply drinking water to 40 families.
whose wells were contaminated with the pesticide ethylene dibromide (EDB). For many years EDB was used routinely in 116 tobacco fields in the Connecticut River Valley, and tobacco is the only crop in the state on which EDB was used. The tobacco companies were also ordered to pay for a study of EDB contamination in the Connecticut River Valley and to monitor ground water near wells found to have EDB concentrations above the maximum allowable level.

Although Martina Navratilova continues to participate in Philip Morris’ Virginia Slims cigarettes tennis circuit and has worn an outfit at Wimbledon with the logo and colors of another cigarette brand, to the best of my knowledge neither she nor any other current professional tennis player has ever sported a non-smoking symbol on her uniform. Nor have there been any attempts to counteract the association of cigarette brands with the image of successful professional tennis players.

If women athletes—or the parents of participants as young as 14—truly wished to clear the air, they could demand that the tournament be renamed for something other than a cigarette brand name, that the cigarette advertising be removed from courtside and the scoreboards, that cigarette advertisements be deleted from souvenir programs, that free distribution of cigarettes be stopped, that the logo of the tournament be changed from that of a woman holding a tennis racket in one hand and a cigarette in the other, and that an alternate sponsor be sought.

Such changes would reduce the exploitation of women by the tobacco industry.

In a related incident, the Boston branch of the American Medical Women’s Association has protested the use by a cigarette company of an athletic facility on the Boston University campus for the Virginia Slims tournament. But letters to the University’s president have been largely ignored. Somehow I doubt an objection by Dr. Richards would be similarly ignored. Would she care to prove me wrong?

Renee Richards, MD
Somerville Hospital
230 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

The rare courage of public role models

TO THE EDITOR: Your December 1983 issue devoted entirely to smoking-related articles was a real landmark. You are to be commended for bringing together so many of the world’s most authoritative voices, joined in outrage against smoking. As the head of Group Against Smoking Pollution (GASP) of Massachusetts for the last six years, I have learned firsthand how powerful the tobacco companies have made themselves, and how persuasively their network of influence extends around the world.

The proliferation of cigarette-sponsored sports and entertainment events, as referred to in the Journal, is particularly interesting since it reflects a strategy by which the industry enables its name and logo to become associated with socially redeeming cultural events. However, not all public figures have allowed their name and reputation to be exploited in this way.

For example, a world class runner and Boston Marathon winner, Bill Rodgers, refused to participate in a road race in New England last year after learning that one of the sponsors was a tobacco company (American Brands). This year in Canada, downhill ski champion Steve Podborski refused to accept the winner’s cup in a major race in protest against the sponsorship by a tobacco company (R J Reynolds-MacDonald); the Canadian national slalom champion, Jim Read, returned his trophy for the same reason.

At the other end of the spectrum is Billie Jean King who when asked by GASP last year in Boston why she allows her name to be associated with Virginia Slims cigarettes, replied that she believes in “free enterprise and that it’s up to the woman herself.”

In the entertainment field, in 1982 GASP contacted several stars of a music series being promoted as the “Camel Concerts on the Common.” Singers James Taylor and Peter, Paul, and Mary were outraged that they had not been told of the cigarette sponsorship and announced that they would perform in the concert series only if it were not associated with Camel cigarettes. In a cloud of unfavorable publicity, R J Reynolds pulled out.

These are instances where public figures have taken courageous stands against being involved in sophisticated and deceptive cigarette promotions. They provide models of action for all those athletes and entertainers who say it just can’t be done.

Rita Addison
Group Against Smoking Pollution (GASP)
New England Deaconess Hospital
25 Deaconess Road
Boston, MA 02215

Defeating the tobacco lobby

TO THE EDITOR: On behalf of the American Heart Association I would like to commend the New York State Journal of Medicine for its excellent December edition devoted entirely to ciga-
Hypocrisy on marijuana and tobacco  

TO THE EDITOR: Your December 1983 issue on "The World Cigarette Pandemic" is a breath of fresh air in the polluted atmosphere of cigarette smoke. Your editorial should be distributed to every health professional in this country. It may move us from clouded discussions concerning the dangers of smoking to direct action.

There is one area that I feel should be stressed in any discussion on smoking. That is the issue of tobacco cigarette smoking and marijuana cigarette smoking. We spend millions of dollars in this country promoting tobacco smoking and millions of dollars controlling marijuana smoking.

I hope that a future issue will address this subject. It may help to channel some of the moral indignation in this country over marijuana smoking to moral indignation over tobacco smoking. These two major health issues belong together under addictive behavior and death.

MATT MARTIN
Chairperson
New Jersey Interagency Council on Smoking and Health
129 E. Hanover Street, 4th floor
Trenton, NJ 08608

The author is Chief of Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation, Division of Narcotic and Drug Abuse Control, New Jersey State Department of Health.

Origins of medical news

TO THE EDITOR: For too long we have permitted the media to manipulate medicine for its own interests. Obviously good health and medical news are good circulation builders, whether for the prestigious New York Times or the yellow scandal sheets. For too long, the special advertising interests have prevented the presentation to the public of what they should know about cigarettes, smoking, and health.

There are other areas where medicine must assert itself. Alcohol is handled similarly by the press and television. The contrast that we as physicians see, of wards full of middle-aged and older patients suffering from cirrhosis, polynephritis, and the mental anguish associated with alcohol, and the television image of "happy" young, attractive men and women gloriously guzzling beer, is a sad sight. Again, it sets the picture of an unfortunate role model for our young people.

The media are also quick to seize so-called medical breakthroughs. They do it, I am sure, with the aid of the publicity departments of our most prestigious pharmaceutical companies. The recent instance of the introduction of Oraflex,
for example, in which the television and press barrage prior to its introduction encouraged my patients to request it from me even before I had an opportunity to digest the literature—in this case not even the manufacturer’s handouts.

The authoritative journals have until now said nothing. The so-called “throw-away” journals are even less critical. One journal, which I shall leave nameless except that it shares with yours the term “New” and is regional to the northeastern United States, seems within the last few years to have joined the crowd. Often prior to the publication date and certainly before I receive my copy, there are blurbs on national television and in my local newspaper. Occasionally the message is good. But most often it is premature, of no immediate relevance, and trouble-making.

We need an honest voice for health in the marketplace. I am proud of our Journal.

LEONARD WOLIN, MD
Buffalo General Hospital
100 High Street
Buffalo, NY 14203

Congressional aid
TO THE EDITOR: “The World Cigarette Pandemic” is a fine compilation of the health issues facing all of us, smokers and non-smokers alike. I am pleased to report that we are making some headway here in Congress by taking steps to better educate the public about the hazards of cigarette smoking. Most recently, my colleague Congressman Waxman was successful in passing a bill out of his subcommittee requiring that stiff health-warning labels be printed on cigarettes.

I feel fortunate to have a California colleague leading the way on this issue. I’ll certainly be supporting Mr. Waxman in his ongoing efforts to curb the tobacco industry’s influence in Congress.

DON EDWARDS
10th District, California
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Women and cigarettes: feminine Ms-stake
TO THE EDITOR: Your December 1983 issue is an extraordinary effort-horrifying in what it so professionally reveals and so thoroughly documents, but wonderfully complete and readable! It will save those of us who hope to make changes in human health and the health care industry months of digging for support data.

KAREN WINEGAR
Feature Writer
Minneapolis Star and Tribune
425 Portland Avenue
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55488

Tobacco companies; Good-ill ambassadors?
TO THE EDITOR: The December issue of the Journal is bound to become a powerful reference tool for the hands of private and government agencies trying to deal with an addiction which costs so much in illness, misery, and money all over the world. I am glad that you documented the bad effects that a few “ugly American” corporations are having on the health and economics of other parts of the world. However, I expect that the tobacco industry will continue to spend millions of dollars to tell people that the connection between cigarette smoking and lung cancer, among other things, is far from having been demonstrated. Everyone who works on this must either have a powerful capacity to deny facts, or else have no integrity.

The fact that this publication is by an organization as prestigious as the Medical Society of the State of New York only adds to its authority, but I think the publication in turn increases the prestige of the Society. You wrote that the issue was a year in the preparation, and I can imagine how much effort went into it on the part of many people. I think you are to be greatly congratulated on the product, which will bring us all many dividends in the time to come.

EDITH M. JURKA, MD
116 East 66th Street
New York, NY 10021

Reducing cigarette consumption at the county level
TO THE EDITOR: As President of the New York State Association of County Health Officials, I would like to commend the Medical Society of the State of New York for the strong and positive leadership they have shown in devoting an entire issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine to smoking-related health concerns.

County health directors across the state have long recognized the incredibly high levels of morbidity and mortality which could be prevented by even modest reductions in cigarette consumption within our respective communities, but have found it extremely difficult to take any more than limited action at the local level to deal with this issue.

Publication of the information provided in your December 1983 issue should be of substantial value in stimulating increased activities to counter smoking throughout New York State. Levels of morbidity and mortality are

Grand rounds topic

IRIS SIMON
850 Richmond Road
East Meadow, NY 11554
such that even modest success in reducing cigarette consumption can achieve significant health status improvement and health cost reductions.

JOEL L. NITZKIN, MD
President
New York State Association of County Health Officials
c/o Monroe County Health Department
111 Westfall Road—Caller 632
Rochester, NY 14692

Hospital smoking policy: where there's a will...

TO THE EDITOR: The December issue was an excellent review of the subject of cigarette smoking. I only regret that publication in whole or in part may not extend into the mass media. Based upon many of the articles, such as Dr. Gittel's correspondence with The New York Times, one can see why this might not occur.

As a physician specializing in pulmonary disease, I have been interested in smoking and health since my earliest days in practice when I was involved in the care of many young patients with tuberculosis at Glenside Hospital in Schenectady. I observed that patients who persisted in smoking had more severe symptoms and a slower rate of recovery than those who did not. Consequently, I began strongly advising these patients to discontinue their smoking.

When I became medical director and chief of staff in 1937 (and until my retirement in 1977), I prohibited smoking in both the hospital wards and the business offices. We did permit smoking in the staff lounge; sadly, it was the nurses both then and now who seemed to smoke the most. Overall, with few exceptions patients and personnel cooperated very well with the smoking ban. This made for a much better environment for patients.

JAMES M. BLAKE, MD
150A Glenside Road
Schenectady, NY 12302

Upbeat magazines

TO THE EDITOR: I very much appreciate the list of publications that do not accept cigarette advertising, and I would like to add the names of three others that make excellent reading material for the office waiting room: Alaska (the monthly magazine of "life on the last frontier," $18); The Alaska Journal (a quarterly review of the art, literature and history of the North Country, $16); Alaska Geographic (official quarterly of the Alaska Geographic Society, included with annual membership of $30).

All three are available from Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 130 Second Avenue South, Edmonds, WA 98020.

KATHY WELTZIN
Alaska Council on Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse
7521 Old Seward Highway
Anchorage, AK 99502


The Journal welcomes the names of other such publications.

"You gotta die of something"

TO THE EDITOR: It is extremely encouraging to see an entire issue of a reputable medical journal devoted to the subject of cigarette smoking.

As a family physician practicing in a rural area, I have come to despise cigarette smoking and its effects on people's health. I could spend pages recounting stories of patients who have died prematurely as a result of their cigarette addiction. Sad to say, that I at least partially alienate several patients a week because I encourage them to stop smoking cigarettes immediately.

Thanks so much for putting together this December issue. I will certainly keep it in my permanent files.

DONALD F. BRAUTIGAM, MD
193 East Main Street
Westfield, NY 14787

The silence of The Times

TO THE EDITOR: George Gittel, MD is to be commended for his dedication and persistence in challenging The New York Times with respect to the serious issues involved in the Times refusal to discuss publicly its policy of accepting widespread cigarette advertising.

Like so many social evils, tobacco smoking will never be cured so long as the financial rewards remain so great; in this instance, advertising revenues are the smoked glass by which the Times cannot see its way clear to apply its vaunted editorial principles.

JOSEPH J. MACDONALD, JD
MacDonald, Ryan & Jaekel
Counsellors at law
113 Prospect Street
Ridgewood, NJ 07451

Testimonial

TO THE EDITOR: The December 1983 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine on the world cigarette pandemic is the best symposium on the subject that I have ever read. And as a repentant sinner I have read a great deal.

ABRAM J. ABELOFF, MD
130 East 77 St.
New York, NY 10021

Call for Translators

TO THE EDITOR: A Spanish edition, or abstract, if either is available, will be very much appreciated.

The highly important health problem of cigarette smoking, so well presented in this edition, prompts my request in behalf of our many non-English speaking Hispanics in this area.

M. F. WIEBER, MD
3850 Galt Ocean Drive
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33308

No pussyfooting

TO THE EDITOR: Let me join the chorus who probably have already voiced their admiration for the splendid December 1983 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine. It is a tour de force.

I have already ordered additional copies of that issue and plan to provide each of our county legislators with a copy. The Suffolk County Legislature is in the process of considering a Clean Indoor Air Act which would place restrictions on smoking in public places. Your issue on smoking and health should impel the men and women of the county legislature to take action.

DAVID HARRIS, MD, MPH
Commissioner
Department of Health Services
225 Rabro Drive East
Hauppauge, NY 11788

The measure passed, 13-5, on March 27.

For an ongoing campaign

TO THE EDITOR: I reviewed with interest the December 1983 issue of the New York State Journal of Medicine. I believe that devoting the entire issue to the subject of cigarette smoking was entirely appropriate. I urge the Journal

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to continue on this campaign and to do similar things in other areas (such as drunken driving) in the future.

JOHN H. MORTON, MD
Professor of Surgery
The University of Rochester Medical Center
601 Elmwood Avenue
Rochester, NY 14642

Wider distribution urged
TO THE EDITOR: I wish to express my admiration for the comprehensive manner in which you researched the subject of smoking and the injuries it causes as reported by investigators worldwide.
Using the entire December 1983 issue of the Journal for that single subject must be a first in the annals of medical publications.
I would suggest that, since the articles are understandable by laymen, a copy should find its way to the desks of lawmakers throughout the world.

DAVID MEZZ, MD
3901 South Ocean Drive
Hollywood, FL 33019

STOP PRESS: President urges stepped up effort to counter smoking at the workplace

On March 13 the Health Insurance Association of America produced a video teleconference, “Wellness at the Workplace,” viewed by corporate executives and representatives of the mass media in major cities across the country.
One of the featured speakers was President Ronald Reagan whose acknowledgment of the physical and economic toll taken by cigarette smoking was one of the strongest statements against smoking made by an American president in this century.
Yet few if any radio or television stations or newspapers reported on his comments.
Following is the text of his statement:

I'd like to commend the insurance industry for the creativity, diligence, and foresight they've demonstrated in organizing this event. I appreciate being given an opportunity to contribute to your totally worthwhile endeavor.

Disease prevention and health promotion is in all of our interests, not only for people in the insurance business, but for employees and employers throughout the wide spectrum of American enterprise. I don't need to tell you employers that the illness of your employees is a costly proposition. A healthier workforce means higher productivity, reduced absenteeism, and less overtime. In the long run, it also means a reduction in the cost for employee health benefits.

Today we've conquered the old killers like smallpox, diphtheria, and polio. We understand that how each of us chooses to live will, more than anything else, determine our health.
Executives are in a position to provide leadership in this area, because working people spend about half their waking hours at work. With little or no financial investment, the employer can influence his or her employees to change some bad habits that heavily affect one's health.

Cigarette smoking is, perhaps, the best example. We all know how harmful it is. Well, the illness resulting from smoking is costly to both the smoker and his or her boss. A helping hand to assist employees to break the habit might be a wise investment.

Good eating and exercise habits are another area employers could use their influence. We are all aware of the fitness programs in Japanese companies. It's something you might think about.
I'm certain that this teleconference will provide enough ideas. The question now is whether you're willing to take the steps necessary to make a difference. Those of you who take this to heart have my sincere thanks.

America can only be as strong and healthy as its people, and, as in all things, the only lasting change that takes place comes when each of us does his part to make our country the good and decent place we want it to be. Thanks for letting me do my part. God bless you.
Ethics of The New York Times under scrutiny

Many readers have expressed disbelief and anger over the failure of the publisher and editors of The Times to address their own role in the promotion of disease and high medical costs through the publication of cigarette advertising. A promise by the manager of advertising acceptability for The Times to seek answers to a number of questions about the newspaper corporation's acquiescence in promotion of cigarette smoking led to the following letter.

NEW YORK STATE JOURNAL OF MEDICINE

February 15, 1984

Dr. Robert P. Smith
Manager
Advertising Acceptability
The New York Times
199 West 15th Street
New York, NY 10011

Dear Dr. Smith:

At your suggestion, I am following up on our telephone discussion about advertising policies of The New York Times. In light of the ongoing response from readers in regard to the issue of the Journal on "The world cigarette crisis" (Vol. 61, No. 3), I am preparing an editorial reply that will focus on the article entitled "Cigarette advertising in The New York Times: An ethical issue that's smoldering". I appreciate your offer to provide written replies to questions on this subject.

The advertising policies of The Times, as presented in the two advertisements on either the upper- or lower-half of the front page or in the back pages (Tuesday and Thursday), are guided by the moral and ethical considerations that have been a part of the newspaper's history for many years. We are not ourselves engaged in the selling of cigarettes, but we believe that our readers have a right to know about the health hazards associated with smoking.

To the best of my knowledge — and in contrast to editorial comment by The Times on advertisements for cigarettes or for tobacco products — there has never been a editorial in The Times that has addressed the ethics of the acceptance of advertising for cigarettes that directly results in more than 350,000 deaths each year in the United States. Does The Times acknowledge that the small warning combined with the vivid imagery in cigarette advertisements may indicate some readers into a more favorable attitude toward cigarettes and a greater social acceptance of smoking?

Has The Times published any article or letter critical of the newspaper's policy of accepting cigarette advertisements?

Why does The Times not accept advertising for mail-order cigarettes or foreign cigarettes? Are there advertisements for other legal products that The Times will not publish?

Unlike other corporate advertisers and unlike the advertising campaigns by The Tobacco Institute, the new series of advertisements by R.J. Reynolds to support the use of the company's product and attempt to discourage the reader from believing that cigarette smoking has been proven to cause harm to the consumer and users of cigarettes — or to any other person, including children and the infirmed — why does The Times not require the manufacturer to comply with the 12-year-old Federal Trade Commission agreement that a comprehensive warning be included in every advertisement? By not requiring the warning on advertisements that sell death, we are aiding the dangers of smoking, does The Times not know that the public is being suggested that cigarette companies have not been given sufficient opportunity to change their ways or that there is indeed doubt that smoking is harmful to health?

I regret that Mr. Cunningham, tobacco advertising manager, declined to be interviewed on the subject of tobacco advertising. I intended to ask him — and now ask you — whether responsible for the ongoing campaign by The Times in the United States Tobacco Journal (now the United States Tobacco and Cigar Journal) offering tobacco manufacturers the space of The Times as a valid vehicle for selling cigarettes: does this not acknowledge that The Times is in the ethical conflict of interest of tobacco companies? Does not the slogan, "Lifestyles are made, not born" reveal that The Times is encouraging young people to take up smoking?

As is discussed in the advertising column of the business section in regard to all sources of ad accounts, how much does The Times spend on its campaign to alienate cigarette advertisers? The estimate of the Times' annual income from cigarette advertising exclusive of income from advertising for British American Tobacco's Silhouette and Snake Fifth Venom cigarettes has been put at $17 million — is this a fair estimate?

Again, I appreciate your offer to provide written answers from The Times management to these questions, and I look forward to receiving your reply in the interest of publication deadlines. I would appreciate hearing from you in the next two weeks. Sincerely.

Robert Brez, M.D.
Editor

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Alan Blum, M.D.
Editor
New York State Journal of Medicine
420 Lakeville Road
P.O. Box 5904
Lake Success, N.Y. 11042

Dear Dr. Blum,

Robert Smith, manager of the advertising acceptability department of The Times, has shared with me your letter of February 10th.

My recommendation has been that he give up the effort to respond to your many questions, because his answers could really bring us no closer to mutual understanding. There is a fundamental difference in our beliefs.

You believe that the way to eliminate cigarettes and smoking is by eliminating the advertising of cigarettes. We believe that if this is to be achieved it must be done legislatively and with information and education, not by preventing promotion or discussion or advertising.

It is probable that no other publication in the world has carried so much information about the relationships between smoking and health. Just as we believe in fair and comprehensive news coverage, so do we believe in the right of the entrepreneur to advertise.

I hope you will accept this brief statement of our viewpoint as our response to your letter, Dr. Blum. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

13 March 1984