

Beckley Doctor Refuses Patients Who Are Addicted to Cigarettes

By **LAURA ZELENKO**
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A couple of weeks ago, John Cannell diagnosed lung cancer in a 40-year-old mother of three children.

That's when he decided "never again."

Cannell put out a ban on cigarette smokers, refusing to see any new patients who are addicted to tobacco.

"I just got tired and really questioned whether I should be taking care of people consciously addicted to a drug as dangerous as tobacco," said Cannell, a family practitioner at his Beaver clinic in Beckley.

Cannell took out newspaper ads saying he had closed his doors to any new patients who smoke.

The ads stirred a lot of angry responses, Cannell said.

"If it hurts my practice, it hurts my practice," he said. "I don't like the frustration anymore of trying to make people get well who don't want to get well."

Cannell, 38, has always had a policy of refusing to hire workers who smoke. And he's never let anyone smoke in his waiting room.

But the new policy is the first time a doctor in the state has refused patients because of cigarette addiction, said an official with the West Virginia chapter of the American Lung Association.

"I've never heard of a doctor who will not accept a new patient because he smokes," said Kathi Elkins, assistant executive director of the association. "I think that may even be a violation of the Hippocratic

oath."

Mert Scholten at the West Virginia Medical Association said Cannell has not violated any medical code of ethics.

"It is within bounds of medical ethics to select patients as (a doctor) wishes. The only exception to that is a true emergency situation," Scholten said. "I think he's making an interesting statement by taking that action."

More than 80 organizations in the state, mostly health care institutions, have some type of restriction against smoking in the workplace, Ms. Elkins said.

A number of doctors have said they will release a patient who continues to smoke despite the doctor's advice to quit, she said.