

March 11, 1994

Mr. Dan S. Wilford
President
Memorial Healthcare System
7737 Southwest Freeway at Beechnut
Houston, Texas 77074

Dear Mr. Wilford:

Having very much valued the opportunity to be invited on several occasions to give lectures on health promotion and disease prevention to my family medicine colleagues at Southwest Memorial Hospital, I know firsthand of their strong commitment to work against the promotion and use of tobacco products. Accordingly, I am writing to express my concern upon seeing that you are listed as serving on the Honorary Medical Committee for a March 19 concert sponsored by Virginia Slims cigarettes. This event is being widely promoted in newspaper advertisements (which carry a Surgeon General's warning about smoking) as a benefit for AIDS research.

In recent years, a key public relations strategy of the tobacco industry has been to create various new identities as a means of attaining social acceptability in the communities in which major cigarette promotional campaigns are conducted. In this case, the Virginia Slims cigarettes tennis tournament, which recruits 9 to 12 year old boys and girls to work as ballpersons, will celebrate its 25th anniversary year in Houston with a series of high-profile activities beginning with the Virginia Slims concert with which your name is associated.

If a cigarette company can now appear to have earned the endorsement of respected members of the health community for its thinly veiled promotions, then it will have succeeded in dealing a major blow to those of us who have worked unceasingly on the front lines of this depressing battle.

In response to colleagues who express dismay about the Virginia Slims and other tobacco-sponsored events in our community, I offer my opinion that none of the members of this "Honorary Medical Committee" would have knowingly

permitted his name to be used in connection with the world's largest manufacturer and promoter of cigarettes, and that the arrangement must have been made through a public relations employee doubtless unaware of the true identity of the event's sponsor.

You may be interested to know that in 1992 former President Jimmy Carter formally disassociated himself from a similar Virginia Slims-sponsored AIDS benefit in a letter to the Atlanta Constitution. I would appreciate your giving serious consideration to this issue and hope we might discuss it.

Sincerely,

Alan Blum, MD
Founder and Chairman

AB/ev enclosures

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