

2022 National Conference on Tobacco or Health

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Primary Presenter

Registrant ID: 7093915

First Name: Alan

Last Name: Blum

Credentials/Degrees: MD, DSc [Hon]

Organization: University of Alabama School of Medicine

Title: Professor, Family Medicine; Director, Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society

Address1: 26 Pinehurst Dr

Address2:

City: Tuscaloosa

State: AL

Zip Code: 35401

Country: United States

Phone: 2057999478

Fax: 2053482889

E-mail: ablum@ua.edu

Biography Since founding the first physicians' anti-smoking activist organization Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) in 1977, Dr. Blum has given over 2000 invited presentations on tobacco and has published over 100 peer-reviewed articles. As editor of the Medical Journal of Australia and the New York State Journal of Medicine, he produced the first theme issues on the world tobacco pandemic at any journal. In 1988 he received the Surgeon General's Medallion from Dr. C. Everett Koop, who wrote, "Dr. Blum has done more against smoking than anyone." In 2006 Amherst College awarded him an honorary Doctor of Science for his career-long effort to combat the tobacco industry. Since 1998, he has served as Professor of Family Medicine and Director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society (csts.ua.edu), the most comprehensive archive of original documents and ephemera of the tobacco industry and the anti-smoking movement throughout the past century.

Have you ever been employed by or received any funding from the tobacco industry (including manufacturers of tobacco products, the Tobacco Institute, law firms, or other interests representing tobacco companies to conduct research or provide consultation), the pharmaceutical industry (including producers of smoking cessation products), or another for-profit healthcare company that sells products or conducts research relevant to tobacco control policies (including e-cigarette manufacturers or marketing companies)?: I have not received any funding from these entities.

Please provide additional detail explaining the funding received and your relationship with the entity. If your abstract is accepted, you will be required to complete and sign a disclosure of conflicts of interest form providing this detail and more of these relationships.:

Co-Presenter 1

Registrant ID 7093916

First Name: Eric

Last Name: Solberg

Credentials/Degrees: MS

Organization: University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

Title: Vice-President for Academic and Research Affairs

Address1: 7000 Fannin Street

Address2: #1200

City: Houston

State: TX

Zip Code: 77030

Country: United States

Phone: 7135003596

E-mail: eric.j.solberg@uth.tmc.edu

Bio Eric Solberg, MS, is Senior Vice President for Academic and Research Affairs at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. He is also a Faculty Associate at the McGovern Center for Humanities and Ethics of the McGovern School of Medicine in Houston. He previously served as the Administrative Director for the NCI-designation of Comprehensive Cancer Center at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center; founding executive director of the Flight Attendant Medical Research Institute; executive director of Doctors Ought to Care (DOC); and manager of health promotion programs for the North Dakota Department of Health. He has written numerous articles and textbook chapters on the tobacco industry and anti-smoking activism. In the 1990s he was the first individual in tobacco control to organize thousands of internal tobacco industry documents and provide them to the FDA to support its case for regulation of tobacco products.

Have you ever been employed by or received any funding from the tobacco industry (including manufacturers of tobacco products, the Tobacco Institute, law firms, or other interests representing tobacco companies to conduct research or provide consultation), the pharmaceutical industry (including producers of smoking cessation products), or another for-profit healthcare company that sells products or conducts research relevant to tobacco control policies (including e-cigarette manufacturers or marketing companies)?: I have not received any funding from these entities.

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Session Information

Poster Session:

Panel Presentation (75 minutes): Yes

Individual Presentation (20 minutes):

Session Title: Seeing COVID-19 through a cloud of cigarette smoke

Session Abstract: please provide a brief (500 words or less) description of this proposed session. Please note that if your abstract is accepted this description may be published in meeting materials as is, or may be edited for clarity or brevity.: The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to compare the public and governmental responses to previous health crises. The most obvious comparison is to the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, which took the lives of 675,000 Americans. However, a comparison to cigarette smoking, which killed untold millions of Americans in the 20th century and continues to take the lives of 500,000 a year, is more illuminating and sobering. Comparing COVID-19 to cigarette smoking at first seems illogical. People who take up smoking do so willingly, although most do so before they reach adulthood. Those who contract COVID-19 do not willingly seek out the virus. Disease and death from smoking take years to decades to occur. Deaths from COVID-19 can occur within days to weeks, albeit in less than 1% of victims, most of whom have comorbid conditions such as hypertension, obesity, and emphysema. Yet as we assess the 50-year War on Cancer that was declared by President Richard M. Nixon upon signing the National Cancer Act of 1971, lessons from past anti-smoking campaigns can be applied to efforts against COVID-19. The same mentality that denied smoking's devastating health toll and opposed efforts to restrict smoking in public places has returned with COVID-19, wherein the vaccine is considered more threatening than the virus and wearing masks abrogates freedom. The cigarette companies' promotion of filtered, low-tar cigarettes as "protection" against smoking's harms beginning in the 1950s is not unlike the touting of hydroxychloroquine, zinc, bleach, Lysol, UV light, and ivermectin for the prevention of COVID-19 infections. Although the 1964 Surgeon General's Report laid down the gauntlet for ending the smoking and lung cancer pandemic, every president, Democrat and Republican—Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, and Obama—passed the buck on cigarettes. In 2020 the Trump administration's economy-over-lives policy for COVID-19 downplayed the simplest, most effective, and least expensive measures--mask-wearing, social distancing, and hand-washing. This malfeasance mirrors previous presidents' lack of a playbook for ending the cigarette pandemic, even decades after it was recognized as the nation's leading preventable cause of death and disease. Trump's denial of the severity and ease of spread of COVID-19 is reminiscent of the reaction by President Jimmy Carter to the launch of the government's first anti-smoking campaign by Secretary of Health Education and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr., in January 1978. Califano's efforts were undermined by Carter, who traveled to North Carolina to assure tobacco farmers that the government would make cigarette smoking "even safer than it is today." The present-day opposition to federal, state and local mandates for wearing face masks in public places to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is akin to the political opposition in the 1980s to a federal ban on smoking on airplanes and state and local bans on smoking in public places. Then, it was North Carolina Republican Sen. Jesse Helms was beating back anti-smoking bills.

Today, it is Kentucky Republican Senator Rand Paul (a physician), among others, who is opposing CDC recommendations for vaccination and mask-wearing.

Supporting session documentation (OPTIONAL): If you have additional documentation that you believe is critical for reviewers to have in order to evaluate your submission (i.e. journal article, poster design), you may choose to upload that document here. (Word, PDF, .jpeg, or Excel files may be uploaded.: 306429-2-80782-47d11ad9-3917-49bd-9bc3-34182d275279.docx

Learning Objective #1: As a result of attending this session, participants will be able to cite three similar barriers to tackling both the COVID-19 pandemic and the tobacco pandemic.

Learning Objective #2: Participants will be able to cite two similarities and two differences between the smokers' rights movement of the 1980s and 1990s and the anti-COVID-19 vaccination and anti-mask mandates protesters of the 2020s.

Learning Objective #3: Participants will be able to contrast the budgetary allocations of state and federal governments for COVID-19 prevention with those for smoking prevention and cessation.