



Transparency

DR. ALAN BLUM

GERALD LEON WALLACE, MD, ENDOWED CHAIR, FAMILY MEDICINE

Step into The University of Alabama's Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society, no more than a few rooms tucked into a corner in the University's Nott Hall, and you'll find shelves of newspaper articles nearly touching the ceiling, walls of vintage advertisements for Philip Morris cigarettes and more recent anti-smoking campaigns parodying Camel and Marlboro.

"What I do is study the history of the issue," says Blum, the founder of the Center and the Gerald Leon Wallace, MD, Endowed Chair of Family Medicine for the College. "What did the industry do to perpetuate it success, and what did the people concerned do to limit it?"

The better part of Blum's career as a physician has been dedicated to the issue of smoking. A large portion of the collection housed at the Center he brought with him when he came to the College, and he's served as a public health advocate on the topic by writing op-eds for newspapers and editorials for medical journals, presenting at conferences around the world, and putting together exhibits. One of his recent exhibits was shown at Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library on The University of Alabama campus in 2013—it marked 50 years since the famous Surgeon General's Report.

"Although the report concluded more than 50

years ago that cigarette smoking caused lung cancer, it remains the leading cause of lung cancer, heart disease and emphysema—and the annual death toll from smoking continues to rise over 480,000," Blum says. "The Center was established to tell the story not just of the successes in countering tobacco use and promotion but also of the failures."

Shedding light on those successes and failures is how Blum works to increase transparency of the issue.

"A lot of physicians think smoking really isn't much of a problem anymore because they don't see it in hospitals or clinics," he says. "But it is a predominantly lower income and education practice, and it is not well addressed. I'm trying to turn the public health narrative on its head by reminding people that we are far from eradicating smoking. We still have our work cut out for us."

Blum says his patients keep the work ahead at the forefront of his mind.

"Caring for patients and hearing them tell of the toll that smoking has taken on them and their family is a constant reminder that just because hospitals and clinics have gone smoke-free, the prevalence of smoking, especially in lower economic and lower education attainment groups, is still high."

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF TOBACCO RECEIVES GIFTS

The University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society received generous, multi-year gifts in 2015 from Dr. John Richards and the Richards Family Foundation and Celia Wallace. The Center is directed by Dr. Alan Blum, the Gerald Leon Wallace, MD, Endowed Chair in Family Medicine at the College of Community Health Sciences and one of the nation's foremost authorities on the history of smoking and cigarette marketing.

Blum says the gifts will be used to "pave the way toward enhancing the Center's website and organizing the vast collection of museum exhibitions, which total 12 to date, films and videos, and journal and media articles." (csts.ua.edu)

Founded by Blum in 1998, the Center serves as a repository of resources charting the history of tobacco marketing in the United States and holds his vast collection of more than 500,000 original items related to tobacco—books and pamphlets, cigarette ads and promotional products, editorial cartoons, original photographs and memorabilia from tobacco-sponsored sports and cultural events, and videotapes, DVDs and audio recordings of tobacco-related news stories, cigarette commercials and documentaries.

Richards says it is important that the Center's resources and documents be placed in the public domain where they can be easily accessed.

"The Richards Family Foundation has given a grant of

\$50,000 to the Center for each of the past three years to be used to support the archival activities of the Center," Richards says. "The Center houses the largest and most varied collection of specimens documenting the genesis, culture, manufacturer, marketing, promotion, business, political and immoral collusion in the world."

Richards, a board member of the Georgia Regents Research Institute and a self-described "serial entrepreneur," previously was a physician and researcher at the Medical College of Georgia, where he treated countless patients suffering from the effects of cigarette smoking. He met Blum following a talk Blum gave in Kansas City in 1977. "Smoking causes one-third of preventable deaths, yet I had been all the way through medical school and Alan's talk was the first time I had ever even heard the problem addressed," Richards has said.

Wallace, also a long-time supporter of the Center and Blum's work, is chair of the Mobile, Ala.-based Springhill Hospital board of directors and wife of the late Dr. Gerald Wallace. She established Blum's endowed chair in memory of her husband, who died in 1986. He was a graduate of the University of Alabama School of Medicine, practiced family medicine for 20 years and founded Springhill Memorial Hospital.