

AFTERWORD:

Why did hospitals resist change for so long, given the criticism and scorn heaped upon them by people in allied professions? Why did it take public pressure to finally ban smoking inside hospitals? In the following afterword, Alan Blum, M.D., founder of “Doctors Ought to Care” (DOC), explains how the allied medical professions—resolutions notwithstanding—were equally indifferent to the effects of smoking. They often “talked the talk” but did not “walk the walk” (take action). Blum’s DOC had chapters in 150 locations around the country, including St. Louis. He was a vociferous critic of the tobacco industry but equally critical of the medical profession (including hospitals) for dragging their feet over 40 years.

I first encountered Dr. Blum when conducting research for the *City of St. Louis* case. Knowing his reputation as a critic of the tobacco industry, but also of the medical profession, I told him upfront that I was working for the defense but wanted to leave no stone unturned in finding out what the hospitals (and medical professionals) knew and why they resisted the efforts of groups like DOC. My background research on Blum revealed a man driven to fight smoking ever since he was trained in an Atlanta, Georgia hospital. Rather than lecture and chide smokers, he spoofed tobacco advertising and held events such as “Emphysema Slims” athletic tournament to draw a contrast between the sports supported by certain tobacco companies and the damage he saw as a doctor.¹ While we don’t agree on all things, we both agree that hospitals were in no position to cast stones.

A brief biographical sketch doesn’t do Blum justice: One major newspaper stated that “Blum’s style mixes Ralph Nader’s reformist zeal with George Carlin’s wicked humor—and a dash of Abbie Hoffman’s impish pranksterism.”² Beginning as a medical resident at University of Miami, Blum started a grassroots group called “Doctors Ought to Care” (DOC). Their flamboyant ridiculing of tobacco advertising, films and sports tournaments sponsored by tobacco companies gave the group momentum. By the 1990s, there were 150 DOC chapters around the country offering materials for schools, doctors’ offices and hospitals. Blum gave 1500 invited lectures, many of them hosted at a hospital where medical professionals of all types could gather. One of the keystones of his “crusade”: paid advertising. Rather than rely on public service announcements that ran at 3 a.m., DOC paid to have its Mad magazine-style satirical advertisements next to tobacco company advertisements. The notion

was “truth may be good, but juxtaposition is better.”³

But the first-hand story of hospitals and smoking is best told by Dr. Blum himself.

1 Linda Langsford, Eric Solberg, Alan Blum, William DeJong, “Challenging the Tobacco Industry through Medical Activism: A Profile of Doctors Ought to Care (DOC), n.p. The 1992 “Emphysema Slims Sports Festival” attracted 3,000 athletes from around the world to Albuquerque, New Mexico. Philip Morris ended its sponsorship a few years later.

2 Linda Barth, “Kicking Butts,” *Houston Metropolitan* (July 1990): 66.

3 Langsford, et al., n.p.