

Blum, Alan

From: Thomas Frieden [tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2002 10:19 PM
To: Blum, Alan; Christina Chang
Subject: RE: Re: 211S para on smoking

Good points!

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/08/02 09:05PM >>>

Hi, Christina. Many thanks for your nice note. My first impression is that it's a fair first draft. But it's not yet ready for prime-time, so to speak. And I don't envy your task. Having worked as a speechwriter for the president of NYU and having written hundreds of short scripts for TV and radio features on health, I realize it's much more difficult to write a 3-paragraph commentary than a 30-paragraph one.

I could go through it sentence by sentence with you by phone if you wish, but let me just give you a few suggestions to consider revising:

1. In sentence one, if you want to say that our children are being targeted by advertising, then just say so: "Each day our children are exposed to cigarette advertisements in the stores they visit and the magazines they read that encourage them to smoke." Or: "Each day our children are exposed to cigarette advertising that encourages them to smoke." Or: "Each day our children are exposed to advertisements that encourage them to buy cigarettes." [This last version would make Philip Morris go ballistic.]

2. For sentence 2, I would consider making it the lead sentence, and I would prefer saying: "Four out of five adults who smoke say they tried their first cigarette before they turned 18." (Percentage figures tend to depersonalize.)

3. For sentence 3, I have no idea who comes up with these claims that "40 schoolchildren become regular smokers each day." [By the way, I think it's easier to read roman numerals and not spelled-out numbers.] Presumably this is an extrapolation from the age-old alarm that 3,000,000 teenagers take up smoking every year. If you feel you must use this kind of claim, which I find stale, then you should consider trying to come up with an example in which the number 40 has a more stunning impact: "...equal to the number of players in the starting line-ups of the Yankees, Mets, Giants, and Jets combined!" Same thing for the sentence, "Unless they quit, over a quarter million of today's teenagers will die of a smoking-related illness." This really won't mean as much as you think. First, the number is so enormous that it becomes meaningless. Second, the number seems to have come out of the blue without any context as to how it was calculated. Third, you don't even name the illnesses, so it becomes abstract and ultimately devoid of meaning. As with the next paragraph, I prefer "stop smoking" to "quit," which is a term for losers (there's even a sports expression that says quitting is for losers).

4. With the next sentence, you've introduced a fighting spirit but haven't told the parent how he or she can counter "these messages." (I mean, if we were really serious, we'd ask the parents to ask neighborhood store-owners to take down the cigarette signs, but I suppose that's not possible because some parents who'll receive this letter are neighborhood store-owners themselves, and others work for cigarette companies that put the signs up.) Plus, you've introduced the problem of "access to cigarettes at home or in our schools," which tends to undercut the claim that it's cigarette advertising that causes children to take up smoking. By implying that children are also influenced to start smoking by parents who smoke and by peer pressure in schools, you're acknowledging that all that cigarette advertising out there isn't the only cause of children taking up smoking. [That's certainly music to the ears of Philip Morris, which holds parents and peer pressure completely responsible for teenage smoking.]

5. As you can imagine, I think the second paragraph shows promise. First and foremost, please eliminate the word "quit," and substitute the word, "stop." I'd be a bit more upbeat in the second sentence:

"You'll

help set a great example for your children if you do." As for the next sentence, "And by not buying cigarettes, you can surely put the money you'll save to better use." The

example about the college education sounds interesting, but when I came to me off the top of my head last night I didn't do any calculation. As it's phrased here, it implies that 18 years of cigarettes equals one year of college education costs. At \$5 a pack, that's \$1800 a year or \$32,850. Actually, if you start socking \$5 a day away in a Certificate of Deposit, a US Savings Bond, a Roth IRA or similar investment, it's a lot more money than that. So the example needs to be refined and fine-tuned till it is accurate and resonates with the reader.

6. The last paragraph needs pepping up. If you're going to mention "the illnesses...caused by smoking," you need to name some of them. That's just how education works: if you think people have already heard that smoking causes heart attacks, emphysema, cancer of the mouth and lung, and countless other diseases, then why are you bothering to send the letter? Moreover, even when one mentions "emphysema," it's still difficult to define it. An alternative way to write a three paragraph letter is to give three unadorned, numbered paragraphs that are simple statements of fact:

1. Cigarette smoking not only causes lung cancer, emphysema, and heart attacks, but cigarette smoke is also a major trigger of asthma, bronchitis, and ear infections--- problems which result in lost schooldays for students and lost workdays for their parents.

2. In spite of the glamorous images and implied health claims of cigarette advertisements, the fact is that smoking so-called "low-tar," low-nicotine, menthol, "lights," and filtered brands is just as likely to cause serious health problems as smoking any "high-tar," non-filter brand. "Tar" just means poisonous chemicals. There is no safe cigarette.

3. The money you save by not buying cigarettes may help pay for the cost of your child's college education. A pack-a-day cigarette smoking habit now costs \$1825 a year. Wouldn't that amount be better invested in your child's future?

I hope the Mayor, the Commissioner, and the Chancellor will give serious consideration to using this latter approach. I'll be available tomorrow (Tuesday) but less so the rest of the week.

Alan Blum, MD
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205-464-5062 (pager)

-----Original Message-----

From: Christina Chang [mailto:cchang1@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Monday, April 08, 2002 4:17 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: Fwd: Re: 211S para on smoking

Dr. Blum,
I'm Dr. Frieden's special assistant. He asked if you could quickly review the write up below. it will be included on a health form that goes to every parent and student each year over the signatures of the Mayor, Chancellor of Education, and the Commissioner of HHealth. He forwarded me your earlier email with points for inclusion...just wanted to make sure this hit the mark.

Thanks,
Christina

Smoking Alert: Every day, our children are exposed to advertising and messages that encourage them to start smoking. As a result, 80% of adult smokers tried their first cigarette before the age of 18. In New York City, forty schoolchildren become regular smokers each day.

Unless they quit, over a quarter million of today's children will die of a smoking-related illness. Together, parents, teachers and health workers must counter these messages and make sure that children do not have access to cigarettes at home or in our schools.

If you smoke, there are many reasons to quit. You can teach your children to not smoke by

your example. Also, quitting keeps your children safe from the dangers of secondhand smoke in the home. And the money now spent on cigarettes could be better used; for example, if you saved the money that went into a pack-a-day habit from the time your child was born, you could have saved enough for a full year of college by the time your child is 18 years old.

The illnesses and deaths caused by smoking are all preventable; it is up to us to ensure that our children stay healthy by encouraging them to stop smoking or, better yet, making sure that they never start.

Christina Chang
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Blum, Alan

From: Thomas Frieden [tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Friday, April 05, 2002 6:28 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: RE: Follow-up

THanks...more later but for now a quick note that the Mayor emphasized while presenting it that it was about saving lives, not raising money. Something like: "It's simple. You raise taxes and tobacco consumption goes down." We're working on the broader message and program....

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/05/02 07:26PM >>>

I hope to have the school suggestions and other comments to you by Monday. Had a nice conversation with your assistant Sara, who said she'd be sending more details on the possible op-ed on the tax increase. I'm game to assist or find just the right person who can do it.

But truth be told, tax increase legislation ain't my bag, and I once wrote an op-ed for the Chicago Sun-Times arguing against cigarette excise tax increases for deficit reduction. Unless such tax monies are directed to help cover the cost of tobaccogenic diseases and otherwise financing paid mass media efforts to reduce demand for tobacco products, they only create a dependence on the part of government for more money and may diminish the urgency of understanding the enormous economic toll these diseases wreak on our community. If at the time of announcing the tax increase the Mayor connected it to reducing the budget deficit, then the moral argument is gone.

As for reducing tobacco sales among children, it may well be measurable in the short haul but is unlikely to be significant in the long run. Every such tax increase on any product has a short-term impact, but this collusive industry holds its course through every storm all the while creating the most effective discount offers and so-called generic, budget brands. I wrote a commentary about this phenomenon in JAMA in 1986 (255:1049-1050), entitled, "Strategies to reduce cigarette sales: excise taxes and beyond," which was in response to articles by tobacco-tax-increase-guru Ken Warner of the University of Michigan. Granted, mine is a minority opinion in the increasingly zealous field of tobacco control, but given that New York already has the highest tax in the nation I can't imagine the tax resonating with very many people, especially if it is not be called for for the right reasons.

So let's try to move beyond the boilerplate, and I'll have some comments over the next few days.

Alan

Blum, Alan

From: Thomas Frieden [tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2002 5:22 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: RE: Follow-up



CHIrec3.doc (822
KB)

Alan,

Would love to see the materials from Dr. Anselm.

I'm attaching an EARLY rough draft of the CHI issue. In TB, we first did a CHI issue, then an "At-A-Glance" booklet, then a pocket card. It worked incredibly well and changed the way patients were treated throughout the City. I don't want to reinvent the wheel, but do think that we can have some success simplifying and getting the message out.

If you have a moment on the 3 sentences for the schools, that would be great.

May 9 is a small workshop to think about how NYC can push the envelope in each of the critical areas in tobacco control. Should be a great group...in fact would love your suggestions re who else should be there.

Tom

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/03/02 05:08PM >>>

Hi, Tom. Thank you for the materials, which I have read and also forwarded to Ed Anselm and Eric Solberg for their comments. So we're on the case and will provide feedback this week. Just so I understand, the attachments you sent are not the same as the draft bulletin you will be sending, correct?

Coincidentally, Dr. Anselm recently put together an issue of the HIP of NY newsletter devoted to smoking.

I'd like to learn more (exactly when, where, and why) about the May 9 roundtable on tobacco, because I might actually be able to be there.

My son graduates that week-end from the Newhouse School of Communications at Syracuse University, and I was hoping to attend the ceremony. A detour through NYC is possible. Thanks again.

Alan

-----Original Message-----

From: Thomas Frieden [mailto:tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, April 03, 2002 1:42 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: Follow-up

Alan,

I'm going to take you up on your offer and ask you to start helping out now. I spoke with Texas this morning and look forward to further exploration.

I find that our perspectives are pretty similar -- mine is much less informed of course.

1. If you had to write one 3-sentence paragraph which goes to every parent and student every year (along with their health form), over the signatures of the Mayor, Chancellor of Education, and myself, what would you say? (Hey, not very effective, but free.) 2. I'm

going to email you a draft bulletin -- we do these regularly on various topics, perhaps they help, and they don't cost much -- on tobacco cessation. Would appreciate your review and comments. 3. May 9 we're having a roundtable on tobacco -- hope you can join us. 4. Thinking about a bulleted plan for tobacco control in the city. A. Have any other good examples from local areas? B. We're thinking of the "10 things" we'd like each of the other agencies/units/groups to do (e.g. medical schools, board of ed, hospitals corporation [attached FYI], etc. etc. Thoughts welcome. C. Will send you draft plan as a work in progress over the next week or so. (Also attaching some fact sheets we did -- I didn't find great stuff -- and this isn't great -- on the net, but that's undoubtedly because I didn't look in the right places. Also attaching a plea for funding for the program, not just a tax -- which leaves out much that is important (especially ETS), just FYI).

Thanks!

Tom

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/02/02 07:43PM >>>

And thank you, Tom, for all the great communication. In answer to your last question, I can be there ("when duty calls..."). It would be a great honor to assist or advise you, not to mention the fulfillment of what I'd hoped to do in the mid-1980s when I tried to jump-start the anti-smoking efforts of the Health Department, the Medical Society of the State of New York, and the New York Academy of Medicine. Mayor Koch was actually out in front of the Health Department and the medical societies on this issue.

Suffering from acute museum- and theater- deprivation, I try to get to New York for three or four days at least every two to three months, and I can always utilize vacation time in order to consult with the Department. My mother, who now lives most of the year in Atlanta, has an apartment at 57th and Sixth Avenue that I can usually stay in.

All in all, barring any unforeseen circumstances (such as a flare-up of my teenage son's Crohn's disease), I can be in New York reasonably often. Indeed, I use any excuse to get back to the City. Our schedules for clinic coverage are set roughly two months in advance, so working ahead to plan visits to New York would be helpful. I might add that I still do a fair amount of lecturing on smoking at medical schools (eg, "The physician's role in ending the tobacco pandemic: clinic, classroom, and community"), and recently hospitals on Staten Island and in Albany have contacted me about my giving a grand rounds on smoking. This has been my bread-and-butter activity, and giving such talks in and around the City that could feature video clips of your personal challenge to each clinician may help build support for your efforts. You'd be amazed how few of our medical institutions have ever held grand rounds, symposia, or conferences on the subject. While there has been much written about the need to understand the "stages of change" in each of our patients in curtailing adverse health behaviors, I think there is an equal need for awareness of what I call the physician's stages of change in becoming involved in the societal effort to reduce the toll of tobacco.

Thanks again for writing.

Alan

Blum, Alan

From: Thomas Frieden [tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, April 02, 2002 5:59 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: RE: Short CV

Thanks Alan!

WE basically want the best person possible -- no need to parse the ad.

Please do have him send his CV, and he can also copy me. I would be happy to chat informally.

I'll get back to you soon about content issues (haven't studied your other email yet).

Would you be interested in/available for consultations up here? What kind of time might you have available?

THanks.

Tom

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/02/02 06:26PM >>>
Many thanks for your thoughtful and prompt reply, Tom. I share your bemusement (or perhaps frustration) in having to post two separate advertisements for the same position, and I was initially a bit puzzled in reviewing the attachments.

In regard to the description of preferred skills ("Ten years of progressively responsible experience in tobacco legislation, tobacco advocacy, tobacco cessation..."), I sincerely doubt that more than a handful of individuals in the entire country (and no more than a couple of MDs) can provide evidence of having this level of experience. When one considers that the very first national meeting of the 50 state tobacco control officers took place just over a decade ago, and that there has been a considerable turnover in personnel in this field, there just isn't a significant corpus of expertise or a great number of individuals who have the know-how in both tobacco use prevention and smoking cessation.

Nonetheless, having now re-read the job descriptions several times and gone back to read that New York Times piece a month ago about your plans to combat smoking in the city, I'm all the more convinced that Eric Solberg would be an ideal match for the position of Director of Smoking & Health. His initial overview and advice alone would greatly facilitate planning the Department's program initiatives and avoid waste and duplication in implementing them. The guy's great.

Might I contact him at this time to suggest that he forward his resume to you and Gary Washington? Meanwhile, please rest assured I will be available at any time to assist you in researching or otherwise providing background material on tobacco issues from cigarette advertising to smoking cessation. I hold the largest sociocultural collection on tobacco at any university, a resource that Mr. Solberg was instrumental in organizing.

Again, thanks for writing.

Alan

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-----Original Message-----

From: Thomas Frieden [mailto:tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, April 02, 2002 12:44 PM

THanks.

Tom

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/02/02 06:26PM >>>
Many thanks for your thoughtful and prompt reply, Tom. I share your bemusement (or perhaps frustration) in having to post two separate advertisements for the same position, and I was initially a bit puzzled in reviewing the attachments.

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Again, thanks for writing.

Alan

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-----Original Message-----

From: Thomas Frieden [mailto:tfrieden@health.nyc.gov]
Sent: Tuesday, April 02, 2002 12:44 PM
To: Blum, Alan
Subject: Re: Short CV

Alan,

Good to hear from you!

I've been trying to reach you to continue our truncated conversation.

FYI I'm attaching the posting which is going out -- ad in the NY Times this Sunday. (It's one position but we have to post separately in case it is a doctor or a non-doctor, apparently.)

Hope we can chat soon.

Tom

>>> "Blum, Alan" <ABlum@cchs.ua.edu> 04/02/02 12:36PM >>>
Hello again. Attached is my abbreviated curriculum vitae for Commissioner Frieden, as he requested.