

Smoking Conference Canceled In Dispute Over Sponsorship

By Susan Okie

Washington Post Staff Writer

A Georgetown University conference on the health effects of tobacco smoke on nonsmokers, scheduled for Saturday, was abruptly canceled this week when several speakers withdrew after learning that tobacco companies were helping to pay for the program.

The sponsorship by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. and Philip Morris Inc. was not mentioned on the advance brochure, and some scientists on the program said they were not told of the companies' support when invited to speak.

Georgetown School of Medicine officials denied any attempt to keep the funding secret, and said those who recruited speakers were instructed to inform them of industry support. They said all sponsors would have been listed on the program, in keeping with university policy.

The events leading to the cancellation stirred a tempest among groups involved in public smoking policy, with Georgetown officials charging that the American Lung Association pressured speakers into withdrawing, and association spokesmen accusing the university of being too casual about corporate funding.

"We wound up canceling the program because it was getting unbalanced," said Dr. Thomas Stair, Georgetown's assistant dean for continuing medical education. "The people who were going to present the best evidence that there are long-term hazards from passive smoking were the ones most easily scared away. The ones who are unabashed apologists for tobacco... were the ones hanging in there."

Stair said the one-day course for

doctors was organized by Sorell L. Schwartz, a professor of pharmacology at Georgetown who has received research funding from the tobacco industry. It was to examine possible health effects of tobacco smoke on nonsmokers, especially questions of cancer risk and long-term lung damage. Stair said Schwartz assured him that all participants would be informed of tobacco-industry funding.

Schwartz said that he and five others on the 12-speaker program belong to the Indoor Air Pollution Advisory Group, consultants to the tobacco industry on environmental tobacco smoke. He said he and other group members had testified, at the Tobacco Institute's request, at hearings before a Senate committee and four state legislatures on bills to restrict public smoking.

To avoid charges of bias because of these industry ties, Schwartz said he sought other speakers for the conference "whose research is good and who are quite clear... that they are very strongly antitobacco." He said he instructed assistants to tell all participants that tobacco companies were sponsors. "I would

have had to be out of my mind to try to put something over on the speakers," he said.

Dr. Alfred Munzer of the American Lung Association said he received a brochure about the conference a few weeks ago and suspected industry backing when he saw the words "environmental tobacco smoke" in the title, because the Tobacco Institute prefers that phrase to "passive smoking."

"I called the Office of Continuing Education at Georgetown and asked who the sponsors were," he said. "I was told that legal counsel had advised them that they could not disclose the names of the sponsors."

Munzer eventually learned that two tobacco companies were sponsors, along with the National Center for Policy Alternatives, the System Planning Corp., the Hospital Corp. of America, the International Association of Machinists and the Service Employees International Union. Lung association officials then contacted speakers to ask if they were aware of industry involvement. James A. Swomley, the association's president, also sent a

telegram last Friday to the Rev. Timothy S. Healy, president of Georgetown University, urging that the conference be canceled.

Stair said three speakers withdrew: Dr. A. Sonia Buist of Oregon Health Sciences University, Dr. F. Charles Hiller of the University of Arkansas and Anna H.T. Wu of the University of Southern California. Schwartz said Buist and Hiller told him they had not been informed of industry sponsorship. Buist and Hiller did not return a reporter's calls yesterday. Wu declined to be interviewed.

Douglas W. Dockery of the Harvard School of Public Health, also scheduled to speak, said he first heard of the companies' sponsorship from other participants last month and called Georgetown to confirm it. He said he decided not to withdraw, but added that he "was pretty uncomfortable with the way it was presented to us...."

He said some who withdrew are working on the 1986 Surgeon General's report on smoking, which focuses on passive smoking, and thought the Georgetown conference "would be a potentially serious conflict of interest for them."

Scott Stapf, assistant to the president of the Tobacco Institute, accused the American Lung Association of "academic goon-squad tactics" to intimidate scientists and silence debate. He said he was disturbed by reports that Donald R. Shopland, acting director of the federal Office on Smoking and Health, had also called conference participants about the industry sponsorship.

Shopland acknowledged that he had contacted some speakers, but said, "I did not urge anybody to drop out." He added, "This [passive smoking] is an issue the industry cares very deeply about. It's part of the whole fabric of whether people view cigarette smoking as socially acceptable behavior."

6/6/86

TELEGRAM -- to Rev. Timothy S. Healy, S.J., President, Georgetown University
Matthew F. McNulty, Jr., Sc.D., Chancellor, Georgetown Medical Center

We are deeply disturbed to learn that Georgetown is allowing itself to be used by the tobacco industry to sponsor a supposedly balanced scientific seminar on the health effects of passive or involuntary smoking. We have learned that the seminar is being funded by cigarette manufacturers and organized by their known paid consultants without public acknowledgement.

We are concerned that reputable scientists, the public, and the press not be deceived by this tactic of the tobacco industry -- a strategy that the tobacco industry has used before. Once again, the cigarette makers seek to obscure the truth about the serious health consequences of passive smoking.

Although this seminar is purported to be an unbiased and legitimate opportunity for clinicians to review the current data on passive smoking, it is difficult to believe that the leaders of this conference, who have been supported by the cigarette manufacturers, will be unbiased when writing up the results of the seminars.

We understand that a number of reputable scientists already have withdrawn from this seminar upon learning of the tobacco industry's connection with it. Undoubtedly, registrants would also withdraw if they were aware of the source of funding.

We urge you to cancel this seminar or at the very least to publicly acknowledge to those you are soliciting the cigarette makers' support and their consultants' role.

Signed,

James A. Swomley
Managing Director
American Lung Association