From the World Health Organisation

Strengthening tobacco control in central and eastern Europe: report of a training seminar

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"We want to implement comprehensive national tobacco control policies as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO), but how do we go about it?" That is one of the questions most frequently asked of WHO's Tobacco or Health Programme. Participants in a training seminar held in October 1995 at the WHO Collaborating Centre on the Action Plan for a Tobacco-free Europe, located in the Maria-Sklodowska Memorial Cancer Centre in Warsaw, Poland, now have some answers to this question. The training seminar was a week-long active learning experience for participants from 15 central and eastern European countries, together with tobacco control workers from WHO, western Europe, and North America.

The seminar was made possible through a contribution from Health Canada, Canada's national health department. One of the main lessons of the seminar was that collaboration is a key element in making progress towards improved tobacco control—and the seminar was a model of collaboration. In addition to core funding from Canada, the seminar was supported by its hosts, the WHO Collaborating Centre on the Action Plan for a Tobacco-free Europe at the Maria-Sklodowska-Curie Cancer Centre and Institute of Oncology; the WHO Tobacco or Health Collaborating Centre located in the Institute of Public Health in Skaraborg, Sweden; the Swedish National Institute of Public Health in Stockholm, Sweden; the International Union Against Cancer; WHO's Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen; and WHO Headquarters in Geneva.

From Albania in the west to Kyrgyzstan in the east, participants from newly independent states spent each morning listening to and learning from practical advice offered by experienced tobacco control workers from their own geographical region, together with others from western Europe and North America. Papers presented dealt with a variety of themes, ranging from how to carry out a survey of smoking prevalence, how to build a coalition in favour of tobacco control, and how to successfully argue for increased tobacco taxes. Central and eastern European participants were quick to point out that successful tactics from Western countries would not necessarily work in newly independent states. How does one build a coalition of non-governmental organisations when no such organisations exist? How can tobacco taxes be

raised when cigarette smuggling is widespread and uncontrolled?

The afternoons were devoted to workshops where participants from east and west worked together, sharing their knowledge and experience to devise real solutions to real problems. Participants at one workshop wrote a news release that was presented the next day at a press conference. In another series of workshops, reports were written on the current state of knowledge and policy development on tobacco-and-health issues in the Russian Federation, the Ukraine and Bulgaria. In another workshop, participants devised effective counter-arguments to the arguments now being made throughout central and eastern Europe in favour of unrestricted tobacco marketing.

At the end of the week, all participants agreed that valuable lessons had been learned. Some found that the solutions they had found to be successful in strengthening tobacco control were not going to work without adaptations to the social and economic realities that currently prevail in central and eastern Europe. Others learned that the problems they had previously thought to be insurmountable might be solvable after all with some adaptation. Everyone understood that solutions to the problem of global tobacco control depended on many people from many countries, east and west, working together to strengthen global tobacco control.

The battle to strengthen tobacco control around the world will not stop with one regional workshop. In future phases of the project, some trained participants from the workshop will provide further assistance in strengthening tobacco control in central and eastern Europe by participating in WHO missions to countries of the region to help national authorities to strengthen tobacco control policies and programmes.

WHO will also ensure that all regions can benefit from the lessons learned at the training seminar in Warsaw. Full seminar proceedings will be available in the near future. As far as possible, the lessons learned from the training seminar will be applied, not only in central and eastern Europe, but also worldwide. As people learn from one another, more people will learn how the lessons of successful tobacco control policies from different parts of the world can be successfully adapted and applied in their country.

As a harbinger of strengthened tobacco

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control to come, the Polish parliament recently adopted new comprehensive tobacco control legislation. The new draft law mandates strengthened health education and health promotion programmes, partially bans tobacco advertising, creates regulatory power for providing protection from involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke in workplaces and public places, requires strong health warnings on cigarette packages, bans vending machines, and bans the sale of smokeless tobacco. Lithuania also has tough new tobacco control

legislation. The Lithuanian law bans *all* forms of tobacco advertising (direct and indirect) and sponsorship, and ensures smoke-free environments in a number of public places. It also requires mandatory health warnings on cigarette packets, sets maximum tar levels of 15 mg per cigarette, and bans the sale of cigarettes to minors under the age of 18. Both Polish and Lithuanian tobacco control laws were adopted in January 1996, just a few months after the training seminar in Warsaw.

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CITATIONS

Citations is a list of recently published papers and reports that the Editors believe make an important and original contribution to the various fields in tobacco control. Copies of unpublished, private or generally hard-to-get reports that deserve wider notice are also of interest to Tobacco Control and should be sent to Simon Chapman, Deputy Editor, at the address on the inside front cover.

General

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