LETTERS TO
THE EDITOR

Letters intended for publication should be a maximum of 400 words and 10 references and should be sent to Simon Chapman, deputy editor, at the address given on the inside front cover. Those corresponding to articles or correspondence published in the journal should be received within six weeks of publication.

Review of Legislative Responses to Tobacco Use

To the editor – This letter has two purposes. Firstly, I congratulate you, your editorial board, and the British Medical Association on the decision to publish Tobacco Control as an international journal and on its broad design. The first issue is superb – a great combination of excellent research articles and energizing reports on tobacco control activities. The journal will certainly provide a means for disseminating the results of research promptly and will inspire imaginative tobacco control activities around the world.

Secondly, I am flattered that one of your book reviewers has attributed to me authorship of Legislative Responses to Tobacco Use. 1

I did, indeed, write the foreword, but the real author/editor is S S Fluss, Chief, Health Legislation, World Health Organisation (WHO)/Geneva, and editor of WHO’s excellent quarterly, the International Digest of Health Legislation. Your reviewer is quite right that the book is a reprint of statutes published in the Digest from 1978 to 1991. Mr Fluss had the foresight to see that countries seeking to control the tobacco epidemic needed ready access to the laws of different countries. Ss Fluss and WHO deserve credit for this very useful and timely collection of tobacco control legislation.

Every good wish for the continued success of Tobacco Control.

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Tobacco sales: Canadian pharmacists ignore professional recommendations

To the editor – Canada is one of the few countries in which tobacco is sold in pharmacies. Several provisional licensing bodies have taken steps to eliminate this practice. A survey was undertaken by Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada to determine the level of compliance of Ottawa area pharmacies with professional recommendations for the sale and advertising of tobacco products that were established by the Ontario College of Pharmacists on 17 June 1991. These place increasing restrictions on tobacco displays and promotions, eliminating the use of tobacco sales in pharmacies by 1 July 1993 (Ontario College of Pharmacists, unpublished report, 1991).

An onsite inspection of all pharmacies that sell tobacco in the Ottawa area was conducted by Physicians for a Smoke-free Canada on 16, 17, and 20 January 1992.

In the Ottawa area 48 out of 114 (42.1%) pharmacies did not sell tobacco in any form. Of the 66 pharmacies that sold tobacco, 41 were found to be displaying cigarettes on, beside, or in front of the service counter, in violation of the recommendation that this be eliminated from 1 October 1991, and 61 were in violation of a recommendation prohibiting the advertising and promotion of tobacco in signs, displays, or advertising material including “back bar” displays as of 1 January 1992.

Over 60% (41/66) of the pharmacies that sold tobacco are not in compliance with the Ontario College of Pharmacists’ recommendation that “by October 1, 1991, all tobacco products [should be] behind service counters” (as published in the report of 1991). Independent drugstores are complying at a rate of 55% (16/29) while the chains are complying at a rate of only 24% (9/37).

Over 90% (61/66) of tobacco selling pharmacies are in violation of the recommendation requiring that “by January 1, 1992…back bar displays and…all activities advertising and promoting tobacco” be discontinued. Independent drugstores are complying at a rate of 17% (5/29), but none of the 37 chain pharmacies are in compliance.

Pharmacists throughout Canada have recognized the essential incompatibility of tobacco sales and the pharmacist’s role as a health care provider. 1 In light of this, many privately owned pharmacies have stopped selling tobacco. 2 The Ontario College of Pharmacists is to be commended for putting forth recommendations to eliminate tobacco sales in pharmacies (unpublished report, 1991).

The pharmacies that continue to sell tobacco products give every indication that they – particularly the drug store chains Shoppers Drug Mart and Pharma Plus – have ignored and will continue to ignore professional recommendations. All five of the tobacco selling pharmacies that follow the college’s recommendations are pharmacist owned and operated – that is, non-members of a drug store chain. All 48 of the pharmacies that did not sell tobacco are independent – that is, non-members of a drug store chain.

Clearly, recommendations for voluntary removal of tobacco from pharmacies will not be successful. This is mainly because large, powerful pharmacy chains, especially Shoppers Drug Mart, continue to violate the recommendations of their own professional governing bodies. Shoppers Drug Mart is owned by Imasco Corporation, which also owns Imperial Tobacco. Voluntary recommendations are unlikely to convince Shoppers Drug Mart to stop selling the products of its sister company.

We have recommended that the Ontario Minister of Health introduce legislation as soon as possible, legislation to prohibit the sale, advertising, and promotion of tobacco products in all accredited pharmacies.

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