

Tobacco endgame is when the industry screams for its life

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‘He who does not know how to look back at where he came from will never get to his destination.’ – Dr Jose Rizal

It’s amazing that governments the world over are working overtime to control the COVID-19 pandemic yet tolerate and seemingly neglect (and some even abet) the tobacco pandemic. If the world responded to the tobacco pandemic (that annually kills 8.2 million people) in the same way it has COVID-19 (that has killed 5.5 million over the past 24 months), wouldn’t we realise the tobacco endgame sooner than later?

Clearly, this hasn’t happened, because the tobacco industry has convinced the world that tobacco use is normal and that the tobacco industry should be allowed and even encouraged to continue its ‘socially responsible’ business (totally false)¹ while providing tax revenues and jobs. Apparently, many have forgotten and not learnt from the tobacco industry conspiracy against humanity,^{2–4} while the industry has learnt and adapted, because it knows its future is at stake. To bolster its false claim as a legitimate stakeholder in tobacco control, it has invested billions beyond developing reportedly less harmful products or spinning its image as a transformed, more responsible and science-based industry. For example, the Philip Morris funded Foundation for a Smoke-free World isn’t just another industry front group but one that’s stolen ‘smoke-free’ terminology to ‘accelerate the end of smoking’ and co-opted tobacco control advocates in its narrative.⁵

Donning the electronic robes of a false messiah while continuing to drive the tobacco pandemic and oppose evidence-based tobacco control measures, industry has gone as far as proclaiming that tobacco control has failed to reduce smoking, that hardened smokers have a right to switch to ‘less harmful’ products, despite the hardening hypothesis remaining unproven,^{6–8} that nicotine’s as benign as caffeine and that tobacco control advocates are manufacturing scientific evidence while denying the science of its newer ‘smoke-free’ products.

Sadly, many have accepted the industry’s definition of acceptable harm, placing debatable harm reduction front and centre, attempting to redefine the endgame and sidelining proven policy measures that would accelerate a genuine endgame: reducing affordability through taxes, comprehensive marketing bans, 100% smoke-free environments, standardised packaging, flavour

bans,⁹ single-variant presentation,¹⁰ limiting retail access,¹¹ phasing out cigarette sales¹² and preventing a new generation of nicotine addiction (eg, raising the minimum legal age or legislating a tobacco-free generation¹³).

This is the real threat to tobacco control’s future. Have we lost sight of the endgame and ceded control of it to the industry? Are we content to allow the industry to do business as usual? We owe it to future generations to make the industry scream for its life.

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