

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters intended for publication should be a maximum of 500 words, 10 references, and one table or figure, and should be sent to Simon Chapman, deputy editor, at the address given on the inside front cover. Those responding to articles or correspondence published in the journal should be received within six weeks of publication.

Against a tangled Web

EDITOR,—I was heartened to see Ron Davis' editorial on the internet, as well as the short news story on GLOBALink in the Summer 1997 issue of *Tobacco Control*.^{1,2} The new-found world wide web and the important connections that are provided through the internet bring a vital resource for tobacco control progress. I fear that while the businesses of tobacco production, manufacturing, and promotion are already using technological expertise for networking, tobacco control advocates are just now getting connected to electronic communication systems.

While a Rothmans manager waxes poetic about the market potential of China as "the limits of space",³ tobacco control advocates have an instrument to challenge both space and time. Challenging tobacco interests is a 24-hour, around-the-globe activity. If we are content with merely watching the web, we will have already conceded to the trends and we will have already given the tobacco industry a global victory.

Although I am sure Dr Davis does not mean to imply that our information use be that passive, I wonder how many tobacco control advocates have realised the importance of this tool for round-the-clock progress. Tobacco control researchers, lawyers, doctors, and advocates met recently in Beijing at the 10th World Conference on Tobacco or Health. The excitement and interchange were electrifying, and the conference produced reinforcement and action. It was a collaborative opportunity to multiply each other's efforts. But is such empowerment once every three years enough?

Today is a new day for the power of information. Although tobacco control has made progress with the evidence, sufficient skilled human resources to transform the world of tobacco control are awaited. I encourage all to give high priority to the opportunity of this new power of information and communication. As a start, I urge *Tobacco Control* to publish important research findings and breaking news in electronic form.

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- 1 Davis RM. Web Watch: tracking tobacco on the internet. *Tobacco Control* 1997;6:81.
- 2 Simpson D. GLOBALink. *Tobacco Control* 1997;6:86.
- 3 Mackay J. Smoking in China: "the limits of space". *Tobacco Control* 1997;6:77-9.

In reply,—We agree with Stephen Hamann's call for tobacco control advocates to give high priority to use of the internet. That is precisely why we have launched "Web

Watch", which has now appeared in three issues of the journal, including this one (pages 361-363).

Hamann urges *Tobacco Control* to publish "important research findings and breaking news in electronic form". Our parent publication, the *BMJ*, has been publishing many of its articles on the journal's web site <<http://www.bmj.com/bmj/>>, and the entirety of the *BMJ* will soon appear on the web.⁵ At present, the web site <<http://www.tobaccocontrol.com/>> for *Tobacco Control* contains the table of contents for the current issue and back issues, along with our Instructions to Authors and information about subscribing. Our web site also includes a longer version of a document published in our "Play it again" section <<http://www.bmj.com/data/tob-pia/home.htm>>.⁶ We expect that abstracts of articles we publish, and the full text in some cases, will appear on our web site in the future.

As a quarterly journal with a rather lengthy production timeline, we are unable to report "breaking news" either in print or in electronic form. However, several web sites perform this service quite well, including GLOBALink <<http://www.uicc.ch/gt/>> (access limited to members), SCARCNet <<http://www.scarcnet.org/>> (access limited to members), The Tobacco BBS <<http://www.tobacco.org/>>, and Jack Cannon's home page <<http://www.gate.net/~jcannon/tobacco.html>>.

RONALD M DAVIS

Editor

- 4 Delamothe T. *BMJ* on the internet. *BMJ* 1995;310:1343-4. <<http://www.bmj.com/bmj/archive/6991e-1.htm>>.
- 5 Delamothe T. Developing *www.bmj.com*: full text current issues available from the world wide web. *BMJ* 1997;315:1558. <<http://www.bmj.com/archive/7122/7122e5.htm>>.
- 6 Davis RM. Doling out soundbites in a Presidential campaign. *Tobacco Control* 1996;5:317-39.

Good mathematics

I am not much of a mathematician.
But I can ADD to a man's nervous trouble.
I can SUBTRACT from his physical energy.
I can MULTIPLY his aches and pains.
I can DIVIDE his mental powers.
I am able to ENTER where he works
and DISCOUNT his chances for success.

—I AM A CIGARETTE.

By school pupil NV Ndamone, South Africa.
Source: IATH (International Agency on Tobacco and Health) Bulletin, December 1997.