



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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“Cigarettes and Pictures of Corpses”

Pictures of diseases caused by medications should be shown following the pitch by the drug companies. Then, the patient could make a reasonable decision about unnecessarily taking potentially harmful drugs injudiciously. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, new warnings are on the way for cigarettes and graphic pictures of corpses and cancer patients could be required. Larger and more graphic health warnings on cigarette packages and advertising may be required as part of a new tobacco control initiative aimed at cutting down the number of American smokers, which is responsible for about 443,000 deaths per year. Although these changes are not finalized, the agency said they are “part of a broader strategy that will help tobacco users quit and prevent children from starting” to smoke. Warning phrases could be, “Smoking can kill you” and “Cigarettes cause cancer” and they will be required to cover at least 50% of the back and front of packages and 20% of any advertisements. Graphic images on cigarette packs and in ads will be in color and will depict the disastrous consequences of smoking. Reportedly, “proposed pictures include throats with holes in them, cancer patients, corpses and rotted lips and lungs.” Thirty countries have introduced similar labels. HHS Secretary, Kathleen Sebelius, said, “Today marks an important milestone in protecting our children and the health of the American public.” This move is the latest aggressive federal tobacco control campaign launched after Congress gave the FDA the power to regulate tobacco in 2009. Sebelius said, “Every day, almost 4,000 youth try a cigarette for the first time and 1,000 youth become regular, daily smokers.” Manufacturers will have until Sept. 22, 2012, to comply with governmental packaging rules. Curiously, the FDA places graphic warnings on cigarette packs while the Feds reportedly subsidized tobacco growers to the tune of \$202,918,426 in 2009 alone.

In the America that I love, about 20% of all American adults are now lighting up, but puffers are in steady decline. The addictive drugs in cigarettes should be handled in a fashion similar to medications or banned all together. However, this approach has been already tried in the United Kingdom and has seen only limited success, which causes tobacco companies to concentrate their sales efforts even more in emerging markets and in underdeveloped countries. I do not believe that trying to scare someone out of an addiction is going to work but it may scare some kids away from ever starting to smoke, even if \$5.33 per pack does not. If California sets the trend for America, we may soon have to introduce “scare tactics” to try to prevent kids from lighting up a joint. Yes, folks, times are changing!

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