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SECRET

A SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO  
THE CHARGE OF ADDICTION

Background

The belief that the subject of addiction will be contained in either the letter of transmittal to Congress or in the Surgeon General's report itself is based on news stories that arose after a summer meeting of the National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse. The stories reported that the Council had recommended to the Surgeon General that an addiction warning be placed on cigarette packages.

The Council's recommendation was based on the report of an August 1979 meeting sponsored by NIDA in which seventeen "experts" were convened as a "Technical Review Group on Cigarette Smoking as an Addiction." The group concluded "That cigarette smoking behavior should be considered a form of addiction, and tobacco in the form of cigarettes, an addicting substance."<sup>1</sup>

Given the one-sided conclusion of the NIDA Report, one wonders why the final section recommends research programs to elucidate "the behavioral and pharmacological variables which influence both the maintenance and elimination of cigarette smoking behavior..." and to explore "the role of nicotine in the initiation and maintenance of cigarette smoking." Such statements seem to suggest that there are more questions than answers about the smoking habit and that

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any conclusion that cigarettes are addictive is premature.

The description of smoking as an "addiction has become a convenient way for anti-smokers to criticize both the product and its consumers. One example is the recent statement of a member of the National Advisory Council who said his group used the term "addictive" in its recommendation because it's "sort of a dirty word."<sup>2</sup>

In studying smokers' motivations, scientists have examined a variety of possible physiological, pharmacological and psychological mechanisms that may be involved in smoking behavior. They have looked at the effect of nicotine on various components of the body. They have looked at the situations in which people smoke, the frequency with which they smoke, the length of the puffs they take on their cigarettes. They have attempted to determine whether or not people smoke more frequently or more intensely if they are given cigarettes with a lower nicotine content than those they are accustomed to smoking. They have examined what happens to smokers when they stop smoking. They have attempted to characterize particular smokers according to classification systems based on the smokers' motivations.

The results of these numerous scientific investigations have been varying and often conflicting. More than anything else, the research has shown that smoking is a complex behavior, that people smoke for different reasons, and that individuals react differently to smoking. The difficulty in distinguishing

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psychological from physiological effects has also been a problem.

Recent scientific publications indicate that the role of nicotine is unclear and the hypothesis that people smoke for pharmacological effects is unproven. One group of researchers has described the area of smoking motivation as "virtually unexplored."<sup>3</sup> An article in the October, 1977, issue of the British Medical Journal describes tobacco smoking as a complex phenomenon, some aspects of which are the physical act of smoking, taste and smell, relief of tension and enhancement of sociability.<sup>4</sup> The final sentence of this article summarized the current state of knowledge as follows: "But what makes people smoke is still largely a mystery..."

It is interesting to note that one well-known anti-smoking spokesman, Dr. Ernst Wynder of the American Health Foundation when asked whether he considered cigarette smoking to be an addiction replied;

"There is some controversy among my colleagues in this area. I consider it to be an habituation. In other words, once you quit the habit, your system will not collapse like that of a heroine addict, but you will live perfectly happily ever after..."<sup>5</sup>

Those who claim that smoking is addictive often cite studies which report that high percentages of smokers want or have tried to stop smoking but continue to smoke. However, such

studies may not be reliable. In a recent Lancet article, researchers "encouraged caution in what is made of what smokers say about their wish to give up smoking and their attempts to do so."<sup>6</sup> The authors, who are opposed to smoking, also pointed out that certain psychological pressures on smokers might make statements about their desires or attempts to stop smoking suspect.

One often repeated claim is that smokers are "addicted" to nicotine. Yet, it is useful to remember that the government agency responsible for the regulation of drugs, the Food and Drug Administration, has denied petitions seeking to have cigarettes containing nicotine regulated as a "drug" on two separate occasions. The most recent ruling, in late November, 1980, reiterated the position that cigarettes do not fall under FDA jurisdiction.

Claims that cigarette smoking is an addiction remain unproven. They represent primarily an attempt to condemn a product and the person who enjoys it by the use of an emotionally charged word.

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## REFERENCES

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