

National Commission on Smoking and Public Policy

Comments by David T. Carr, M.D.

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Mr. Chairman and Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the privilege of appearing before you and sharing with you some of my thoughts about the tobacco problem. Others will remind you of the great number of people who are taken sick, became disabled and die each year because of the use of tobacco. I would like to comment on the importance of the adoption of proper labels in dealing with this problem. This idea is not new. In 1604, King James I of England called smoking a loathsome custom and the smoke itself a black stinking fume. Ramazzini, the great Italian physician of the 18th century, who is considered the father of industrial medicine, called it a vice but realized that then as now "the sweet smell of gain makes the smell of tobacco less perceptible and less offensive."

I suggest that we should consider the use of more appropriate labels in our efforts to reduce the incidence of disease and death due to the use of this poison.

To begin may I respectfully suggest that your commission should have been named the National Commission on Smoking, Disease, and Death. That would have indicated clearly your concern with the overwhelming evidence that smoking causes disease and death and your determination to do something about the problem.

Next, let us consider the cigarette as it is not only the most popular form of tobacco used in the United States but also

the most deadly. The word literally means little cigar but it isn't really a little cigar. We need a more descriptive word that will remind the purchaser and user that it is a form of poison to be self administered by inhaling the smoke produced when the tobacco is burned. When I was a boy cigarettes were called coffin nails. More recently they have been called cancer sticks. I doubt that the tobacco industry would be willing to adopt either of these names but, perhaps, we could find another that would describe more accurately the material and its effects on people.

What about the label on the package? Instead of the innocuous sounding names and the meaningless geometric designs, I submit that the package should have the universally recognized sign of poison, the skull and crossbones along with the word POISON in large letters. In addition, the exact amount of poisonous chemicals in the smoke should be given as well as a list of the diseases known to be caused by these poisons. Unfortunately there is no known antidote that can be printed on the label. The package label should also contain the statement that neither the manufacturer nor the seller can be held responsible for disease or death due to the use of the product for that has been the verdict of the courts of our country.

If advertising of this deadly product is to be permitted in the future, the truth in advertising laws should require that at least one-half of the space of each advertisement be used to describe the poisonous nature of the material and its effects on those who use it.

Earlier I referred to those who manufacture and sell tobacco as the tobacco industry. They were more accurately named by Sir George Godber of England who was chairman of the Third World Conference on Smoking and Health in 1975. He called them The Merchants of Death.

It does not require undue stretching of the imagination to call them pushers as one dictionary defines pusher as "a peddler of narcotics" and tobacco contains the narcotic nicotine. The success of their merchandising or pushing is obvious when one studies their recent appeals to the females of the species to assert their independence by smoking and the alarming increase in the number of females, especially teenaged females, who have become their victims.

What about these victims? How should they be labeled? The medical dictionary contains the words tobacosis and tobagism and defines them as "poisoning by tobacco" and "the condition produced by excessive use of tobacco" respectively. But I have not been able to find a name for the person who uses tobacco to his or her own detriment. If we recall that smoking is the act of sucking the fumes of burning vegetable material into the lungs and that we have a name for one who sucks, perhaps, we do have a label for the smoker. It is interesting that my dictionary defines sucker as "a person easily cheated, deceived or imposed upon."

We come now to the diseases caused by smoking. It is common practice in medicine to label any and all the manifestations of poisoning by a substance as poisoning by that material. For example, lead poisoning is labeled simply lead poisoning whether

it causes abdominal colic, convulsions, peripheral neuritis or anemia or any combination of these. I submit that the medical profession should begin to diagnose chronic tobacco poisoning whenever it occurs whether it is manifested as lung cancer, chronic bronchitis and emphysema, or damage to the cardiovascular system.

Finally we come to the end, as do so many smokers, and we must consider death certificates. The cause of death should be stated clearly and completely on each certificate. If a person's death is due to chronic tobacco poisoning the death certificate should state this fact. Imagine the reaction if our vital statistics suddenly began to tell the whole truth and indicated that chronic tobacco poisoning was high up in the list of the ten most common causes of death in our country. Or perhaps, the death certificate should read chronic suicide. One definition of suicide is "One who dies by his own hand" and surely anyone who strikes a match and sets fire to dried vegetable material so that the poisonous fumes can be sucked into the lungs is committing chronic suicide.

In summary, ladies and gentlemen, proper labelling of each facet of the tobacco problem might speed the day when this blight will be lifted from our land.