

A little bit is not good enough: comprehensive smoking control is needed

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Research on policy making and practise of smoking control of the last decades made it clear that there is no magic solution to the “smoking epidemic”. Each year 5 million people are dying from tobacco use and the numbers are still increasing. Some 50% of all lung diseases worldwide are linked to tobacco use, and the vast majority of projected death caused by tobacco in the next quarter century will be among people who are currently smoking (World Health Organisation 2008). Peto and Lopez predicted that halving the global cigarette consumption per adult by the year 2020 would prevent about one-third of the tobacco death in the second quarter of the century (Peto et al. 1992).

The global awareness about the health issues related to smoking is increasing and more and more countries worldwide introduce smoking interventions and anti-smoking laws. While some interventions seem to be very successful in some settings they can not readily be applied in others for various reasons. Nicotine addiction, prestige and social pressures, aggressive cigarette marketing and overestimation of the economic benefits from tobacco sales are only the most obvious obstacles faced by law makers (Worldbank 2003). Such policy climate favours the adoption of half-hearted interventions which bring, at best, very little success. As shown, only complete bans of tobacco product advertisement are successful whereas partial bans proofed to have little, if any, influence on smoking behaviour (Quentin et al. 2007).

One of several tobacco related articles in this issue of the Journal shows how partial introduction of workplace

smoking bans in the canton Zurich (Switzerland) give leeway to employers to avoid or ignore any interventions: only 43% of companies have at least an indoor smoking ban (Friedrich et al. 2009). This underscores the desperate need for comprehensive and stringent policies to provide 100% smoke-free workplaces and public places to protect non-smokers. Such policies can create a climate of social support at work which influences the smokers’ motivation to quit and their success in smoking cessation (Albertsen et al. 2006).

As important it is to increase smoking cessation to reduce morbidities in adults, it is also of high public health relevance to prevent young people to take up smoking. However, the age of smoking onset is steadily declining, which has detrimental effects on the development in young people (Schneider et al. 2008). To gain acceptance from colleagues, young people entering the work force may start or adhere to smoking in the presence of smoking co-workers (Westerman et al. 1985).

As reviewed by Goodman et al., in this issue of the Journal, comprehensive smoking laws can be very successful (Goodman et al. 2009). Smoke-free laws at workplaces can not only improve health of the workers, but also of the general population. With the implementation of comprehensive smoking laws a shift in cultural acceptance of smoking is expected and young people might be less likely to commence smoking.

It is clear though that smoking interventions are successful only if protection embraces all groups of the society such as the young people and adults. Half-hearted programs come with little gain, thus, will always lack support, and therefore jeopardize comprehensive solutions. It is for that very reason that the tobacco industry (and their constituencies in the policy making arena) favours pseudo-legislations. With smoking still present on national TV

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channels in most countries, particularly in channels and movies watched by young people, smoking continues to be propagated as a socially accepted norm (Hanewinkel and Wiborg 2007). Especially young people are easy targets and seduced by the glamour of smoking.

The raising of taxes and cigarette prices as well as banning all advertising and promoting of tobacco products is only one element of comprehensive legislation. It is clear that the best policy results can only be achieved with comprehensive measurements, which take country specific traditions and cultural behaviour into account. To guarantee the right of living in a smoke-free environment, to dismantle the positive image of cigarette smoking, and to ultimately reduce the burden of smoke-related diseases, comprehensive smoking bans are needed at public places and at all workplaces—including restaurants and the entire hospitality industry!

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