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## LETTERS

## OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER/SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH

## Please confirm that the regulations on standardised (“plain”) packaging of cigarettes and tobacco products will be published soon

Nicholas S Hopkinson *consultant chest physician and chair British Thoracic Society chronic obstructive pulmonary disease specialist advisory group*<sup>1</sup>, John Britton *professor of epidemiology*<sup>2</sup>, Anna Gilmore *professor of public health*<sup>3</sup>, John Moxham *professor of respiratory medicine*<sup>4</sup>, John R Ashton *president*<sup>5</sup>, On behalf of 584 others

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Smoking related disease remains the main cause of preventable deaths in the UK, killing more than 100 000 people each year. Most smokers start in childhood, and exposure to tobacco marketing is known to increase this risk.<sup>1</sup> To protect public health, particularly the health of children at risk of becoming smokers, it is therefore necessary and logical to end the marketing of cigarettes and tobacco products through packaging.<sup>2</sup>

Standardised tobacco packaging includes large picture and text warnings about the health consequences of smoking, as well as clear advice about where to get help to quit. Colourful branding elements that mislead and distract from health messages are removed.<sup>1</sup> Cyril Chantler's independent review found good evidence to support this measure,<sup>1 3</sup> and rejected misleading tobacco industry opposition.<sup>4</sup> Chantler found no reason why standardised packaging would increase the level of illicit trade in tobacco. Key security features on existing packaging will be retained on standardised packs, including number codes and covert anti-counterfeit marks.

Parliament voted overwhelmingly to support the introduction of standardised packaging, and the public health minister announced in parliament that she hoped to publish the draft

regulations for consultation before the end of April.<sup>5</sup> Nearly two months have passed and this has still not happened.

The government has committed to a six week public consultation period after the draft regulations are published, and it will also need to notify the EU of the draft regulations, under Directive 98/34/EC. This process can take up to six months. There is a relatively short time left for the government to produce the draft regulations if they are to be voted on by parliament before the general election. We therefore ask you to confirm that they will be published in the next few weeks.

Competing interests: None declared.

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