

# Editorial

## Smokeless is senseless

Tobacco is the scourge of modern health care—tobacco-related illness is the single most easily preventable cause of premature death in adults. Now smokeless tobacco, in the form of snuff and chewing tobacco, is becoming a serious problem among adolescents and young adults in the United States. The problem of increasing use of smokeless tobacco will undoubtedly expand in other countries as the greed and lack of social conscience of the tobacco companies commands profit at any expense—even death. For tobacco companies, premature death of tobacco users requires a continuous supply of fresh customers. Thus, the young are targeted for introduction to lifelong tobacco addiction.

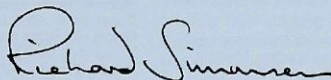
While the dangers of smoking cigarettes are generally well recognized, the same cannot be said for smokeless tobacco. In fact, the youth of the United States are misled by professional baseball heroes into thinking that using smokeless tobacco is “cool.” I wonder what tool the tobacco companies will use to sell cool in other nations of the world.

Education and legislation are needed to combat the tobacco industry. Legislation, to prevent young people from being exposed to misleading advertising and addictive drugs. Legislation, to increase federal excise tax on smokeless tobacco to the level of cigarettes—presently, in the United States, the tax is 3 cents for a tin of snuff and 24 cents for a pack of cigarettes. And education, to expose the myths and malignant advertising techniques of the tobacco industry. Here, we can all play a part.

Every dental office should display literature and posters giving information on the dangers of oral cancer from the use of smokeless tobacco. Every dentist should take the lead in school and community education for our young people. All dental office staff should participate in picking up the signs of smokeless tobacco use in patients. And in corrective education.

The US Department of Health and Human Services recently issued a pamphlet entitled, “Spitting into the wind.” Inside is a dramatic photograph of a human mandible, surgically resected from tooth 36 to tooth 43 with half the tongue and sublingual glands attached. The photograph is bloody testament to the ravages of smokeless tobacco. It should be displayed prominently in schools and medical and dental clinics so that every young person can be made aware of the potential consequences of smokeless tobacco use. This is a battle against formidable opponents who stop at nothing to sell their product.

Smokeless is senseless—let’s make sure our patients, our local schools, and our communities are aware of the danger lurking in the little round can.



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