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The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use

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Other NCI Tobacco Control Monographs

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Greater than the Sum: Systems Thinking in Tobacco Control. Tobacco Control Monograph No. 18. NIH Pub. No. 06-6085, April 2007.

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We dedicate this monograph
to our cherished colleague and friend,

Ronald M. Davis, M.D.

We have considered it a privilege to work with Ron Davis as the lead Senior Scientific Editor of this monograph. Ron is known to many as a passionate advocate for tobacco control, who has used his finely honed skills as a translator of complex scientific concepts to facilitate progress in public health policy. Ron guided the development of this monograph from its conception to completion with outstanding leadership qualities and an unflinching pursuit of excellence. The extraordinary breadth and depth of his knowledge and experience in this field, combined with his scientific rigor and precision, made his contributions invaluable.

Despite being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in early 2008, Ron continued to work tirelessly on this monograph, employing his characteristic patience, good humor, and focused determination. His contributions will help ensure that this volume will serve as a definitive resource to guide the tobacco control community for many years to come.

Both we and the tobacco control community are indebted to Ron for his work on this monograph and for his remarkable and inspiring leadership in the cause of public health.

The Editorial Team of Monograph 19
M.W., E.G., B.L., K.V., S.M., and M.R.

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Foreword

When I first started TV work with the ABC affiliate in Boston in 1972, broadcast television was king, with a realm dominated by only ABC, CBS, and NBC. Even though I got into the business by accident and had no formal training in media, I quickly understood the power of the airwaves to influence the minds and hearts of viewers. I also became very conscious of the attendant responsibility to be accurate and understandable, remembering Mark Twain's admonition (loosely phrased) to beware of reading health books because mistakes can kill you.

Perusing the information in this enormously informative volume, I was once again reminded of those elemental emotions: exhilaration about the opportunities offered by media and anxiety about the potential for misuse. Any phrase or sound bite can affect millions of people. In dealing with tobacco, I think the power of this potential must never be forgotten. Tobacco captivates people when they cannot rationally resist its siren call and can unleash a slow, deadly disease that can kill them even as they try to escape the tenacious trap of addiction. So those of us given the privilege of access to media should be aware of our own responsibilities in the fight against tobacco use—including the need to choose words and images to counter misinformation and temptation aimed at the young entrusted to our care.

I have come to believe that unless we think and feel that we are fighting a lethal battle against tobacco use, we will not succeed in stemming the forces that would promote it. This volume contains a wealth of information about how tobacco companies use media to their benefit. I predict that, like me, even though you have seen them in action, you will be amazed by the tactics used to promote tobacco. Tobacco use is a social phenomenon largely propelled by mass media over the past century, led by tobacco industry professionals who constantly change strategies to reach their goals. They combine the resourcefulness of a profit-making industry with a changing media and regulatory landscape to sell a product that remains our greatest public health challenge. We will not remove tobacco from our society unless we are willing to understand the industry's constantly changing tactics.

But this volume provides encouragement—information about successful efforts to fight back. Again I was surprised by what can work and stimulated to think about new ways to take a stand and make a difference.

I invite you to consider this volume a valuable reference for understanding how media can be used in the war against tobacco. Keep it handy for wise counsel, strategic encouragement, and a partner in a noble cause.

Tim Johnson, M.D., M.P.H.
Medical Editor, ABC News
June 2008

Message from the Series Editor

This volume is the 19th of the Tobacco Control Monograph series of the National Cancer Institute (NCI). This series began in 1991 with a visionary blueprint for public health action on tobacco prevention and control. In the years since, it has disseminated important cross-cutting research in areas such as the effectiveness of community-based and population-level interventions, the impact of tobacco control policies, the risks associated with smoking cigars and low-tar cigarettes, and systems approaches to tobacco control.

The subject matter of this monograph stands at the confluence of three major trends of the past century: the growth of mass media, the concomitant rise in cigarette smoking as a social phenomenon, and more recently, research to understand and to decrease the disease burden caused by tobacco use. Cigarettes are a product of the mass media era; the art and science of mass communications and mass marketing were critical to the growth of tobacco use in the past century. At the same time, however, the media have contributed significantly to the roughly 50% decline in smoking prevalence that took place over the past four decades, by increasing public knowledge of the health hazards of cigarette smoking, helping to change social norms about cigarette smoking, and increasing public acceptance of tobacco control policies.

This monograph summarizes what we have learned about the ability of the media to encourage and discourage tobacco use. There has been much interest in and study of media, and several government publications document the impact of advertising on tobacco use. This publication provides the most comprehensive and critical review and synthesis of the current evidence base in this area, drawing on work from many disciplines and research traditions. There is growing interest in applying what we have learned in tobacco prevention and control to other public health areas (such as dietary behavior). This monograph has important messages for public health researchers, practitioners, and policymakers as well as those in the communication science and media studies communities.

This monograph provides a comprehensive assessment of the literature on developing effective pro-health media messages and on policies to control tobacco marketing, both in the United States and abroad. This information is critical to support efforts to reduce the use of tobacco and the morbidity and mortality associated with its use. The evidence presented in this volume also underscores the need to continue to study and understand the ability of protobacco forces to change media strategies to adapt to a changing tobacco control policy environment.

We are pleased that Dr. Timothy Johnson, Medical Editor for ABC News, has provided the Foreword to this volume. As a physician who began working in television in 1972, he has a long-standing record of communicating the harmful effects of smoking to the public. His background and commitment provide invaluable perspectives about the power of the media and why this monograph is so important for tobacco prevention and control.

Stephen E. Marcus, Ph.D.
Monograph Series Editor
June 2008

Preface

The work presented in the National Cancer Institute's Tobacco Control Monograph 19, *The Role of the Media in Promoting and Reducing Tobacco Use*, is the most current and comprehensive distillation of the scientific literature on media communications in tobacco promotion and tobacco control. This ambitious effort to synthesize the science bridged the disciplines of marketing, psychology, communications, statistics, epidemiology, and public health and represents the combined efforts of five scientific editors, 23 authors, and 62 external peer reviewers.

The six main parts of this monograph deal with aspects of media communications relevant to tobacco promotion and tobacco control. Part 1, an overview, frames the rationale for the monograph's organization and presents the key issues and conclusions of the research as a whole and of the individual chapters. This section describes media research theories that guided this assessment of the relationship between media and tobacco use, which can be viewed as a multilevel issue ranging from consumer-level advertising and promotion to stakeholder-level marketing aimed toward retailers, policymakers, and others.

Part 2 further explores tobacco marketing—the range of media interventions used by the tobacco industry to promote its products, such as brand advertising and promotion, as well as corporate sponsorship and advertising. This section also evaluates the evidence for the influence of tobacco marketing on smoking behavior and discusses regulatory and constitutional issues related to marketing restrictions.

Part 3 explores how both the tobacco control community and the tobacco industry have used news and entertainment media to advocate their positions and how such coverage relates to tobacco use and tobacco policy change. The section also appraises evidence of the influence of tobacco use in movies on youth smoking initiation. Part 4 focuses on tobacco control media interventions and the strategies, themes, and communication designs intended to prevent tobacco use or encourage cessation, including opportunities for new media interventions. This section also synthesizes evidence on the effectiveness of mass media campaigns in reducing smoking. Part 5 discusses tobacco industry efforts to diminish media interventions by the tobacco control community and to use the media to oppose state tobacco control ballot initiatives and referenda. Finally, Part 6 examines possible future directions in the use of media to promote or to control tobacco use and summarizes research needs and opportunities.

Key lessons from this volume can inform policymakers as well as scientists and practitioners. Most critical from a policy standpoint is the conclusion, supported by strong evidence, that both exposure to tobacco marketing and depictions of tobacco in movies promote smoking initiation. A fundamental theme throughout this monograph is the dynamic interplay between tobacco promotion and tobacco control, whereby action in one area produces change in the other. For example, when limits have been placed on tobacco promotion, the tobacco industry typically has resisted, evolving alternative strategies to effectively reach current and potential smokers with media messages that promote its products.

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