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## LETTER: Smoking's health costs outweigh rights

Posted Mar 05, 2011 @ 02:11 PM



In response to the editorial "**Smoke and mirrors**," March 1, the key issue around banning smoking products in pharmacies is not addressed. This issue has less to do with rights and more to do with irresponsible retail tobacco marketing and distribution.

The tobacco industry has never been interested in presenting accurate information to consumers about the effects of tobacco — a more truthful health perspective. Nearly one death out of five is from tobacco use.

There are 4,000 chemicals in smoking products with 40 agents that cause cancer. In cigarettes, the amount of nicotine, an addictive drug that acts on several parts of the body, has risen 11.8 percent since 1997, an industry response to the regulation of tobacco. Do we really want these products to be easily accessible to our loved ones — poor, elderly, or young? The five independent pharmacies that do not sell tobacco products have not closed down.

Tobacco advertising and access plays an important role in encouraging young people to begin a lifelong addiction to smoking before they are old enough to fully understand its longterm health risk. Ninety percent of adults who smoke began before the age of 21.

Tax revenue from tobacco sales cannot match the burden that tobacco use inflicts upon our health system.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health currently reports:

- Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and illness in Massachusetts and in the nation.
- Tobacco kills more people each year than car accidents, AIDS, homicides, suicides and poisonings combined.
- Smoking costs the Massachusetts economy more than \$5.5 billion each year.

Have we not the right to set the standard as a community to build a healthy lifestyle for all?

*Karin Wood*  
Fall River

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Comments (3)

FRVMAN02

3 weeks ago

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Smoking is not against the law so if people want to smoke that is their choice , this is still a free country and you or nobody else has a right to tell anyone else how to live their lives .

yankeegurl1121

3 weeks ago

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I am a smoker and I pay for my own health insurance. I am sick of hearing how much it costs the state. The state is collecting enough off cigarette taxes aren't they? Why don't you go after alcohol? Oh yeah they did only to have it repealed. I don't recall getting the option to do away with the cigarette tax. Let's talk about how much it costs the city for all these drug addicts getting checks, food stamps, free medical and free drugs!

RegMann

2 weeks ago

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Have we not the right to set the standard as a community to build a healthy lifestyle for all?

The simple answer to this is NO.

We live in a free society where the government doesn't have any business in regulating potential unhealthy behavior. You can discourage it, you can educate about it, you can do just about anything save telling people what they can put in their bodies. It's the reason drug use isn't illegal (unconstitutional) but rather possession.

My problem with this approach is this: What is unhealthy? What types of studies do we require to implement governmental control? You can't even get all the doctors to agree second hand smoke is dangerous, so where do we draw the line?

And once we go down this road, where will it end? Once we eradicate smoking, obesity quickly takes it's place in your stats above, so do we then regulate what foods people can eat? And what happens when the scientific opinion on what is bad and not bad for you changes as it's done these last years with everything from eggs and bread to coffee and even wine?

Besides, as yankeegurl points out, those stats are total healthcare costs, not public costs.

But the point in this argument is this: Arguing that drugs and cigarettes shouldn't be sold in the same store not only penalizes the stores that have pharmacies, but just doesn't make sense. Again, what's next? If you have a pharmacy you can't sell cheese? Or personal lubes with pleasure enhancers? What about booze? My local CVS has a liquor department at least the size of the pharmacy, so do we ban their sales as well. I don't think it would be too much of an argument there is little health benefit from whiskey and vodka shooters.

It all boils down to: If it's legal, and sold legally, the state should not be telling people who can and cannot sell it. It's just too restrictive.

Let's get rid of smoking, sure, but if we think this is protecting kids I think it's time we check our prescription levels, somethings got us thinking like we are high.

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