

# Burning Issue

---

D. N. Goldstein, MD, Editorial Director

*Editor's note: The following editorial was published in WMJ, Volume 63, p. 169, March 1964.*

**N**ow that the Surgeon General's report on smoking has confirmed to the public what had been general knowledge for a long time, it will be interesting to see what action the federal government will take against a demonstrated health hazard.

Obviously, a ban on the sale of cigarettes can't be legislated: the sad experience of the Volstead act suggests that making the use of cigarettes illegal might lead to an era of smoke-easies, butt-leggers, and secret inhaling. By printing a message of warning on each package, the cigarette manufacturer would merely underline the hazard the smoker chose to ignore when he bought the pack of cigarettes in the first place. In fact, the only reasonably positive measures the government can undertake are educational in nature. Against the counter-education of the Madison Avenue professors, who work for much higher wages, the government's warnings would probably have the effect of a flute in a windstorm.

The government can, however, take certain negative measures through the Federal Trade Commission and the Federal Communication Commission. Within legal limits, the advertising of tobacco companies could have the same limitations imposed upon it as has the liquor industry's advertising. As no ad ever shows a person drinking beer,

wine or whisky, so ads should be prevented from depicting anybody actually smoking a cigarette. Suppression of advertising copy to the effect that smoking is a concomitant of enjoyment, a hallmark of glamor, or a mark of virility should go a long way toward making cigarette puffing attractive only to confirmed smokers. It's the occasional smoker, the beginning smoker, the non-habitual smoker who can be saved from cigarette addiction, and the ban of no-holds-barred advertising might do the trick.

Whatever measure the government takes, the action of our media of communication with regard to tobacco advertising will be a significant note on their sense of responsibility toward the health and welfare of the public. In the face of the proven fact that cigarette smoking may be injurious to many people, will newspapers, radio and television networks, and magazines continue to accept the same kind of cigarette advertising as they have done in the past? Or will they have the integrity to sacrifice a part of their income for the sake of the public good? Will they do it voluntarily or will it require a legal decision?

—D.N.G.

advancing the art & science of medicine in the midwest

**WMJ**

*WMJ* (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

© 2014 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

**Visit [www.wmjonline.org](http://www.wmjonline.org) to learn more.**