

Wrong way to go smoke-free

By JOSEPH G.L. LEE

CHAPEL HILL

So, now R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company wants to help smokers "break free" from tobacco? That statement should make parents, health care providers and smokers nervous.

Last month, Reynolds promoted its Camel Snus (a "spit-free" tobacco pouch) with advertisements in national magazines that read "If you've decided to quit tobacco use, we support you," under a large "2011 Smoke-free Resolution" banner. Reynolds then offered its smoke-free snus as the solution.

POINT OF VIEW

For smokers, the majority of whom try to quit every year, the message should be to quit tobacco use, not to substitute one form of cancer for another.

No safe form of tobacco use exists. Smokers who try tobacco snus products are at high risk of becoming addicted to both cigarettes and snus, thus continuing or even adding to their risk for lung, bladder, breast, cervical, oral and pancreatic cancer.

In addition to running these misleading ads in People, Time and Rolling Stone, R.J. Reynolds is continuing a long-standing practice of targeting vulnerable populations such as young people, African-Americans and gays and lesbians.

Last year, research in the medical journal Pediatrics implicated Reynolds' "Camel No. 9" campaign in an increase in smoking among young teenage girls.

The tobacco industry has long targeted African-Americans by focusing on marketing and so-called "corporate social responsibility" strategies to buy favor with civil rights organizations. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco estimated that the approximately \$25 million in tobacco industry corporate philanthropy that funded African-American community groups, when divided by the number of premature deaths from tobacco in black communities, meant that each African-American death was traded for \$555 in corporate support.

In December, a court in Massachusetts found Lorillard, Inc., liable for targeting black teenagers with free samples of menthol cigarettes.

Now, Reynolds has begun targeting gay and lesbian newspapers across the country.

Our own research at UNC-Chapel Hill shows that gays and lesbians are 50 percent to 100 percent more likely to smoke and thus to die much earlier from tobacco-related diseases. We recently conducted surveys in gay and lesbian bars and Pride Festivals in West Virginia in which 45 percent of those surveyed reported using a tobacco product. These rates of tobacco, cigarettes and snus use are alarming and likely even higher among transgender populations.

Researchers have documented that industry-designed youth prevention programs actually increase youth susceptibility to trying cigarettes. New campaigns that promise a smoke-free life by promoting other addictive tobacco products will likely keep more people addicted to tobacco.

Smokers who want to quit for real should talk to their health care providers, make a quit plan and call the free Quitline at 1-800-QUITNOW or visit www.BecomeAnEX.org.

The evidence is clear: advertisements from the tobacco industry sell death, half-truths and promote health inequalities. Federal judges have let stand industry racketeering convictions resulting from conspiracy to hide health consequences of smoking. Smokers' resolutions to quit should not be co-opted into deeper addiction by industry advertising.

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