



*Features*

*Chroniques*

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*Can Med Assoc J* 1997;156(2): 244-5

# Canada a country of two solitudes when smoking rates among anglophones, francophones compared

Steven Wharry

*In Brief*

DELEGATES ATTENDING A RECENT NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SMOKING and health learned that there are distinct differences in smoking habits between anglophones and francophones, and that Quebec has the world's highest smoking rate for adult women. Speakers said the high smoking rate in Quebec points to the need for francophone-specific antismoking messages, not simply messages that have been translated from English.

*En bref*

LES DÉLÉGUÉS PARTICIPANT À UNE RÉCENTE CONFÉRENCE NATIONALE SUR LE TABAGISME et la santé ont appris qu'il y a des différences marquées entre les habitudes tabagiques des anglophones et des francophones et que les femmes adultes du Québec ont le taux de tabagisme le plus élevé au monde. Les conférenciers ont affirmé que le taux élevé de tabagisme au Québec souligne le besoin de messages anti-tabac qui s'adressent spécifiquement aux francophones et non de simples traductions de l'anglais.

**S**moking within Quebec has given a new meaning to the term "two solitudes." Smoking rates consistently run 5-10% higher among French-Canadians than English-Canadians, and Quebec probably gives tobacco its strongest bulwark in the country.

It is no slouch internationally, either. The province has the dubious distinction of claiming the highest smoking rate among adult women (38%) for any jurisdiction in the world. Historically, cultural differences have been blamed for the province's high smoking rates but antitobacco advocates now say that the lack of concerted francophone antismoking campaigns may be the real culprit.

The province was recently dubbed "Canada's weak link for tobacco control" by Maurice Gingues, project coordinator at the Canadian Cancer Society. However, antitobacco advocates are now increasing their French-language efforts to convince francophones to give up the habit.

Gingues has led a charge for francophone-specific initiatives. He tells anglophone colleagues they should not overlook francophones when preparing anti-smoking drives. "When campaigns or events are planned to raise awareness I always ask, 'What are you doing in French?'" Gingues said during a workshop on francophones and tobacco control that was part of November's Second National Conference on Tobacco or Health. "This is not to be politically correct, but to keep the movement going and make it stronger."

Gingues said he rarely finds promotional and educational materials prepared specifically for a francophone audience, but the situation is improving rapidly.

"The movement is largely anglophone, but there really is an openness on the part of our English colleagues to reach francophones," he said. "This doesn't mean telling them what to do, but helping them to develop the tools they need to get the job done themselves."

Some observers note that the 1994 drive to reduce Canadian tobacco taxes because of the surge in tobacco smuggling received strong support in Quebec. "Health advocates in Quebec suffered a crushing defeat with the rollback of those taxes," said Louis Gauvin, head of the Coalition québécoise pour le contrôle du





## Pharmacy tobacco ban does not cause bankruptcy

When Ontario banned the sale of tobacco products in pharmacies in 1994, some drugstore owners said the move was tantamount to putting them out of business because it would drive customers away. However, antitobacco advocates report that the ban's effect on pharmacies was minimal and no drugstores failed because of it.

Dr. Mark Taylor, the Winnipeg surgeon who heads Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, told November's National Conference on Tobacco or Health that data released by the Ontario College of Pharmacists show there was no change in the rate of pharmacy closures the year after the government banned tobacco sales in pharmacies. Ontario is the only province to make the move, and antitobacco advocates heralded its decision as a major victory in the campaign to limit access to tobacco products.

When the Ontario legislation was introduced pharmacists argued that a ban on cigarette sales infringed their rights under the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Pharmacy chains led the opposition to the ban on sales but the Ontario Court of Appeal upheld the decision of a lower court and dismissed the challenge.

Taylor said the college's new data prove that economic and legal challenges to the sales ban were unfounded.

tabac. "We didn't do enough to address the smuggling issue but now we are seeking out allies in the battle to get taxes raised."

The coalition is a loose alliance of organizations united in trying to reduce tobacco use in Quebec and among francophones throughout Canada. Launched last summer, it now comprises 250 organizations, community groups and municipalities.

The coalition is trying to create a network of communities to exchange information and spread the antitobacco message in French. Besides its work within Quebec, the coalition held workshops in New Brunswick and Manitoba — both provinces with significant francophone populations — in an attempt to gather support and spread the francophone antitobacco message nationally.

Ontario, which is also trying to develop tobacco-control resources in French, recently prepared a guide aimed specifically at the province's francophones. André Nadeau, who helped prepare the guide for the Ottawa communications firm of Beaulieu, Nadeau and Associates, said antitobacco advocates usually fall into the trap of simply translating material and expecting it to influence francophones. "To communicate with francophones you have to tailor the message," he stressed. "Just because a communication method works in English doesn't mean it will in French."

Gingues applauded Ontario's efforts and said evidence proves that francophones respond positively when offered information in their mother tongue.

"Francophones outside of Quebec are proud of their bilingualism and don't necessarily demand French materials," said Gingues. "However, when we produce the materials, we find the demand is there."?

## LOGIE MEDICAL ETHICS ESSAY CONTEST

**DEADLINE: JUNE 3, 1997**

Once again, *CMAJ* is sponsoring the Logie Medical Ethics Essay Contest for undergraduate medical students attending Canadian universities. The awards this year are \$1500 for the winning essay, \$1000 for second place and \$750 for third place, but *CMAJ* reserves the right to withhold some or all awards if the quality of the entries is judged insufficient. The judges, consisting of a panel of editors from *CMAJ*'s scientific and news and features departments, will select the winners based on content, writing style and presentation of manuscripts. Essays should be no longer than 2500 words, including references, and should be double spaced. Citations and references should follow the "Uniform requirements for manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals" (see *Can Med Assoc J* 1997;156:270-7). Winning authors will be asked to provide a computer diskette containing their essay. The winning essays will be edited for length, clarity and consistency with journal style. Authors will receive an edited copy before publication. Submissions should be sent to the News and Features Editor, *CMAJ*, PO Box 8650, Ottawa ON K1G 0G8.

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