

# NEWS ANALYSIS

All articles written by David Simpson unless otherwise attributed. Ideas and items for News Analysis should be sent to David Simpson at the address given on the inside front cover.

## USA: price cuts and point of sale ads follow tax rise

A number of recent events have drawn attention to the likelihood that pricing and promotional strategies at the point of sale will become even more important to tobacco companies as a way of marketing their products in the United States and may well be used as a strategy to undermine the effects of state tobacco control programmes.

In the wake of the master settlement agreement, tobacco companies announced a US\$0.45 increase in November 1998 in the price of a pack of cigarettes, a rise of nearly 20% on the average price of a premium brand. Based on this rise, per capita tobacco consumption was predicted to fall, but due to promotional discounting practices used by the tobacco companies, it is unclear to what extent the price rise had an effect. Within a few days, special discounts were announced that cut the price of many leading brands by \$0.45 per pack. In the early part of this year, Marlboro, Virginia Slims, and some other brands were still discounted in many communities by \$0.35 per pack and some remained so as late as June 1999.

After a nationwide ban on outdoor billboard tobacco advertising took effect in April 1999, and with growing resistance from newspapers and magazines to carrying tobacco advertising, point-of-sale advertising and promotions have assumed a greater share of the spotlight. This spotlight has grown even brighter with the injunction sought by RJ Reynolds, Lorillard, and Brown and Williamson against Philip Morris to stop the company using its "Retail Leaders"

marketing campaign. The injunction argues that the Philip Morris programme, which offers sizeable discounts to store owners who prominently display Marlboro and other Philip Morris brands, violates federal and state antitrust laws. Rolf Provan, director of trade and strategy for Brown and Williamson, testified in a preliminary hearing in Greensboro, North Carolina, that store placement has grown crucial now that the industry agreed to curtail advertising as part of its \$206 billion settlement with the states.

Monitoring the changing in-store advertising and promotional environment over time is one of the issues being tracked by the Impacteen project, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project, based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, will relate these types of promotions and pricing strategies to tobacco control efforts around the country, and eventually, to measures

of teenage tobacco use. Preliminary analyses undertaken of in-store promotions (providing a gift with purchase of a pack of cigarettes) suggest that these types of promotions are indeed more likely in states with state-funded tobacco control programmes. Early analysis of the tobacco industry documents, along with these developments, provides further evidence that promotional discounts, coupons, and other price-related strategies are far from some sort of random process, but are rather part of a deliberate strategy to offset the impact of tax increases and strong tobacco control efforts.

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A typical point-of-sale display featuring special promotions (circled) and tobacco advertising.

## Turkey: tobacco's hard drive for ban-busting F1

In Turkey, a major national obsession is football—that's soccer, not the American game that keeps teams of orthopaedic specialists in business. But in what seems to be the most desperate attempt to date by the tobacco industry to get round Turkey's 1996 tobacco control law, which includes a total ban on all forms of tobacco promotion, Turkey has recently been subjected to an increasing crescendo of publicity for Formula 1 motor racing. This seems to stem from a highly organised campaign, one of whose aims is to get a Formula 1 grand prix race established in Turkey, and bears the almost unmistakable fingerprints of the tobacco industry.

In a country which to date has shown not the slightest interest in motor racing, health advocates have monitored an extraordinary crop of publicity giving Formula 1 an entirely new and prominent public profile. Magazine articles and radio and television programmes have featured it, and sports programmes that previously ignored its results have now begun to report them. Products not routinely associated with motor racing have begun to bear references to it in their advertisements. For example, the copy of an ad for domestic cleaning products begins by reminding the consumers how "even a tiny dust particle may have an unbelievable effect at a speed of 250 miles per hour." This means that the surfaces of a Formula

1 workshop must be so clean, you could eat off them, the ad helpfully goes on to explain. Teeshirts emblazoned with F1 sponsors' names appeared, a Benetton minibus developed a sign trumpeting Benetton's sponsorship of Formula 1, and the Mobil brand of petrol (gasoline) suddenly added the suffix "-1" to its name.

Perhaps strangest of all, in May, the Istanbul branch of Tommy Hilfiger, the international men's leisurewear chain, sprouted a vivid display of bright red F1 outfits. For a country without F1, it seems decidedly risky to market the clothes you wear when working in the pits at F1 races, or when driving the cars (photographs of a Marlboro driver in his cockpit, and other trackside scenes, were there to set the clothes in context). In early June, the Turkish committee on smoking and health warned the manager of the shop that he was breaking the law, and threatened legal action. Within days the display was replaced by the usual sort of merchandise found in its other branches around the world, and the F1 teeshirts previously on sale disappeared.

Why has all this been happening? The most obvious scenario is that Western tobacco companies have reviewed the options for breaking the tobacco legislation, rated government ministries according to perceived susceptibility to persuasion that F1 will bring economic and political gains, and concluded that F1 is the track to go down. Next step would be to hire a public relations firm, preferably one with similar campaign trophies in its

display case, together with marketing and advertising companies to think up and execute ways to get F1 exposure and keep the cigarette associations ticking over until the race gets properly under way. Then, fill up the tanks with a lot of premium grade dollars, and off down the track until Turkey gets its race, opening up the plethora of media opportunities for giving cigarette brands the fastest, sexiest associations of all.

To resist this campaign, the government will need to prove unusually farsighted and strong. Encouragingly, so far health has managed to hold out, but the social democrat/nationalist coalition has given every sign of taking the deregulation, privatisation route that so favours tobacco companies. Whether they like it or not, Turkish people may have to become familiar with Formula 1, so their children can continue to be lured down the road to smoking by the pushers in the pits.

## Malaysia: & another way round ad restrictions

In the land of indirect advertising, Benson & Hedges bistro advertisements, originally designed to circumvent the European Union directive to ban cigarette advertising, are being fine tuned. Malaysia was selected as the testing ground for the bistro ads, because of its tolerance of indirect advertising, despite a law banning direct cigarette ads. The idea of the bistro was to associate coffee and cigarettes, and to ride on the back of the ever-popular, ubiquitous coffee shops in Malaysia.

The B&H bistro is advertised regularly on national television and even on billboards. The advert shows outdoor activities not usually found in a bistro, such as fishing and parachuting. The script uses pairs of words joined by an ampersand, such as *sweet & bitter* and *sky & earth*.

Once Malaysians were familiar with the B&H bistro ads, the campaign shifted gear and dropped the words to focus just on the ampersand. The billboards which once featured the inside of the bistro now showed a large ampersand, and vehicles transporting Benson & Hedges cigarettes were resprayed, to sport a huge "&". Then, in the next phase of the campaign, a series of newspaper advertisements built up anticipation—*wait & see*, *better & better*, and finally, *here & now*.

In printed media, the campaign has effectively dropped the "Benson" and "Hedges" in the brand name by easy



The Istanbul branch of Tommy Hilfiger prominently displayed Marlboro F1 clothing and pictures (left), until replaced (right) after the Turkish committee on smoking and health threatened legal action.



Benson & Hedges' indirect marketing campaign exploits recognition of the familiar ampersand.

stages, until only the ampersand remains; a similar development is expected in television ads. Meanwhile the Malaysian public has been slowly trained to associate the ampersand with the cigarette brand name. It seems obvious that one goal of this exercise is to prepare the public for the day when cigarette brand names will be banned in any promotions, in the hope that the ban is sufficiently badly drafted to let the "&" get through.

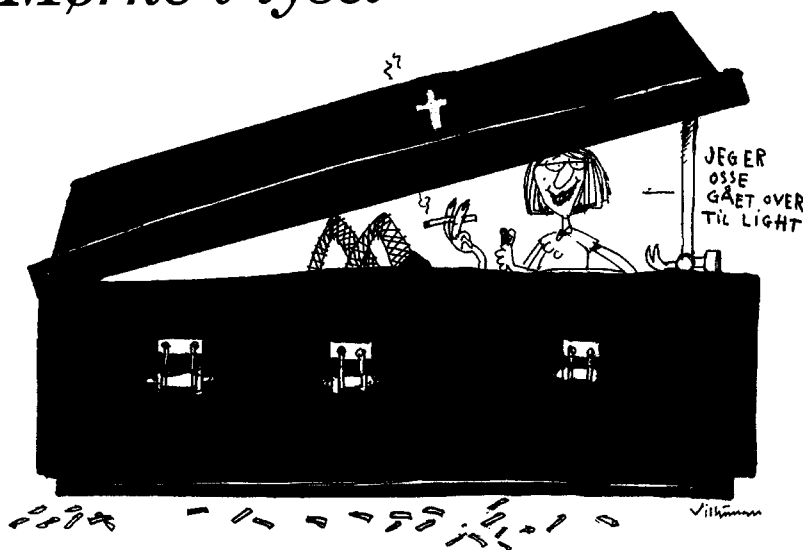
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## Denmark: "light" cigarette ad leads to coffin

The curse of the "light" cigarette myth has been particularly persistent in Denmark, where its pernicious mix of associations with light body weight and perceived low toxin emission levels has been cunningly targeted to women. In one recent ad (bottom right), a woman smoking a Savoy brand "light" cigarette was even seen to feel so light that she could walk out from the shore of a lake on water lilies. (In Christian Denmark, did the art director consciously parody the bible story of Christ walking on the water?) So it is good to think that those who create these wretched ads may have been given cause to re-assess their effectiveness by the response of cartoonist Villumsen in the newspaper *Politiken*. A woman in a coffin says "I go for light", playing on the slogan "I go for Prince" used by Denmark's leading women's brand.

## Mørke i lyset



Forestillingen om lightcigaretten som sundere er røget sig en tur, viser nye undersøgelser.

Cartoon by Jørn Villumsen reproduced by kind permission of Bo Maltesen, editor, "Politiken".



Dr Tony Gale receives his tribute from Dr Karen Sealy, Caribbean co-ordinator of the Pan American Health Organisation; Barbados health minister, the Honorable Liz Thompson, left, is holding the medal.



## Barbados: Gale of change

In recognition of outstanding achievement in cancer education and prevention, leading to the one of the lowest recorded national smoking rates in the world, Dr Tony Gale, director of the tobacco control programme of the Barbados Cancer Society, was awarded a World Health Organization (WHO) Tobacco Free World gold medal in May.

Dr Gale began his work with the society in 1985, and has since been a prominent media spokesman, leading the only programme in the country that has continuously worked on

tobacco. Information has been disseminated via the news media, press articles, 'phone-in programmes, radio and television advertising spots, and cessation groups. The trends in Barbados have been spectacular. Surveys by government agencies showed that between 1982 and 1993, tobacco consumption in Barbados declined by 32%, with daily smoking prevalence among adults of 15–60 years of only 9% in 1993. Admittedly, 82% of adults said they had never smoked, but Dr Gale's work had obviously reached them: a massive 98% said they objected to other people's smoke—a recent survey found that eight out of 10 employers ban smoking at work. No wonder, then, that the cancer society's programme was recognised not only by WHO, but by another evaluation, too, which Dr Gale may treasure almost as much as his medal. Despite BAT, which has 90% of the local market, flying in one of its notorious "hit squads" in 1996 (*Tobacco Control* 1996;5:106–7) in a desperate attempt to fool people in Barbados into questioning Dr Gale's evidence and advice, it shortly afterwards closed the factory it had operated there since 1926.

## Size does matter

Last year a coalition of public health groups succeeded in convincing the Australian government to end the country's historic system of taxing cigarettes by weight and to replace it with the near-universal practice of taxing per stick. There were considerable financial benefits to government in switching to a stick-based system, although the federal treasurer announced the decision as being health-based. The weight-based system had produced a situation where the three tobacco companies reduced the size and weight of cigarettes to fit them into a variety of pack sizes (20s, 25s, 30s, 35s, 40s, and 50s) with considerable variation in price per stick allowing them to target low-income groups, including children.

With point-of-sale (in-store) advertising being all that remains in Australia, one company—the BAT-owned WD & HO Wills—is attempting to continue the "size matters" pitch to its customers. With its advertising agency drawing on the most subtle double entendre, the top figure shows an appeal for the Horizon brand to what the market research undoubtedly uncovered as Australian male smokers' concern about the size of their "wedding tackle".



The bottom figure shows a spoof advertising campaign for the more aptly named Notrizon that *Tobacco Control* understands will be seen on Australian billboards in the months ahead.

SIMON CHAPMAN  
*Editor*

## A-rise, Sir Richard ( $p > 0.001$ )

You've probably seen him at a conference somewhere. If it was a decade or two ago, possibly he sidled up to the rostrum in jeans and open-necked shirt. He may have looked anxious, with head bowed, eyes flickering up, perhaps assessing the chairman's tolerance of what he was about to do. Then he back-swiped a nervous hand through an unruly fringe of

hair, and said: "I'm not going to give the paper I was supposed to present today. I've decided to tell you about something so much more important that it would be just plain wrong to let the opportunity go by. . . ." And there will have followed a devastating tour of the latest statistics on morbidity and mortality from tobacco. This was Richard Peto, *enfant terrible* of epidemiology, passionate and angry at the impossibly large burdens of disease caused by totally preventable factors, especially tobacco, and unafraid of rocking a few boats to get his message across.

More recently, however, you may have noticed a steady growth in his profile, the jeans giving way to a suit, the appearance after his name of FRS—the exclusive Fellowship of the Royal Society—shortly followed by a balancing bookend at the beginning,

the rank of Professor at Oxford University. Now easily recognisable as one of the world's leading epidemiologists and medical research scientists, Richard Peto was knighted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in June 1999.

Originally best known as collaborator with Sir Richard Doll since the 1960s, perhaps more than any other epidemiologist of his generation Sir Richard Peto has coupled brilliant scientific skills with a keen awareness of the need to convey his results to ordinary people in terms to which they could relate. His creativity and energy in delivering user-friendly explanations of risk has led to dialogues and collaboration with government ministers, international and national health organisations, and a large output of vitally important publications.

Peto's clear, simple messages range from his classic 1980s British projections of the early deaths that would occur among 1000 young smokers, to his more recent work with the World Health Organization's Alan Lopez and others, analysing mortality data in Europe, and projecting global mortality from tobacco. But probably his greatest achievements so far are associated with China. Peto was among the first to realise that China's vast size, with some provinces having larger populations than the entire United States, coupled with sharp inter-regional gradients for certain key causative factors, and high standards of science, offered exceptional potential for research, especially with regard to cancer. It is no surprise that the research unit Peto co-directs with Professor Rory Collins in Oxford has a significant number of Chinese scientists, and is working on several important Chinese studies. At the end of last year, his idea for a massive "counting the dead" study evaluating the present and future burden of tobacco-induced mortality in China came to fruition, gaining widespread media attention around the world.



*Sir Richard Peto.*

China means a lot to Peto: he is often to be found there—whether it is using a large briefcase stuffed full of scientific papers to cleave a place in a crowded Shanghai bus, hand-writing overhead transparencies at the last minute while his long-suffering Chinese host writes the translations alongside him, or attending a meeting with senior government officials, he is truly in his element here. Colleagues have witnessed new studies being thought up in the coffee break of a Chinese conference, and heard an already vastly over-stretched Peto agree to yet another collaboration.

As his Chinese work demonstrates, a mathematician's grasp of size and scale colours and informs all Richard Peto's work. His philosophy might be summarised as: "Given limited resources, what can we do to bring the biggest possible health benefits to the largest number of people?" This not only explains why chronic diseases, especially cancer and cardiovascular disease (CVD), are at the core of the unit's work, with a concentration on epidemiological overviews and meta-analyses, but it has also dictated the course the unit's non-epidemiological work has taken.

For although tobacco control advocates think of Peto as an epidemi-

ologist, he and his unit are equally well known in research on pharmaceutical therapies. Peto has looked beyond the point where other scientists have quit, trailing a string of phrases behind them in their papers, such as "not statistically significant" and "would need further research on a much larger scale". Well-founded hints of important benefits or disadvantages in a therapy used to treat one of the big chronic diseases have led Peto and his colleagues to set up massive, randomised studies, whose statistical power is so great that they can answer the questions once and for all. They might turn out to have been just the play of chance in the original, small studies, or they might be real: only a really big study can find the answer. Whichever it is, it could change clinical practice all over the world, and let research proceed unimpeded by the baggage of previous uncertainties.

If even a small benefit is found in treatment affecting huge numbers of people, it will contribute far more than a miracle cure for a very rare disease. Thus the unit's work has included the Isis trials which, among other results, showed the benefits of the humble aspirin over far more expensive drugs in first-line treatment after myocardial infarction; the Heart Protection Study, over four times bigger than any other trial evaluating the effects of a cholesterol-lowering statin on those prone to CVD; the giant, international Atlas trial, to see whether breast cancer sufferers will do better with 10 years' tamoxifen rather than the usual five; and a new study of anti-worm treatment that may benefit some of India's poorest people.

In little more than three decades Sir Richard Peto has already contributed more to world health than most people could aspire to in a lifetime of daydreams. The world of tobacco control is fortunate to have him on its side.