The APJPH Supports “World No Tobacco Day”

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Every year, on May 31, the World Health Organization (WHO) invites us all to join together to mark World No Tobacco Day.1 On this day, we highlight the health risks associated with tobacco use and we pledge to continue working together to advocate for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption. The most important public health issue in the Asia-Pacific region continues to be tobacco use.2

Over the years, the journal has published 83 articles on smoking and no doubt this issue has been mentioned in many other articles. Because of the increase in chronic disease, 40% of the tobacco-related articles in the journal have been published in the past 3 years alone. We welcome continued submissions on tobacco; particularly papers on the ways that countries in our region are able to reduce overall smoking rates and the recruitment of teenagers into tobacco addiction.

Tobacco companies remain a ruthless opponent in promoting and distributing a deadly product across our region. As they face the prospect of declining profits, they are continually inventing new ways to increase the addiction among children, ethnic groups, and existing users.3 They have consistently opposed the introduction of effective health promotion efforts such as the plain packaging legislation in Australia. They are encouraging countries with tobacco industries to sue Australia, and at the present time Indonesia is one of the countries trying to get the Australian public health legislation reversed.4

The small South American nation of Uruguay has a long history of social support and public health programs that are enshrined in its constitution. Its Congress Hall in Montevideo, itself a work of art dedicated to social values, has at its entrance a statue that includes a mother breastfeeding her infant, a strong symbol of social justice and public health. Uruguay enacted strong antitobacco legislation and because of its limited resources it was targeted by multi-national tobacco companies in the courts. With their multibillion dollar assets it looked as if Uruguay would be forced to back down on its antitobacco stance, but the Bloomberg Foundation came to its defense and is supporting the rights of Uruguayans to live a healthy life.5

The tobacco companies are heavily involved in promoting e-cigarettes despite the increasing evidence of their addictive effects on existing and new users.6,7 Recent reports by the WHO and NHMRC (National Health and Medical Research Council) have rejected claims that e-cigarettes can reduce harm from smoking.8 There is little evidence of benefit and emerging evidence that teenagers who would never have taken up smoking are beginning to use vaporizers.9

The tobacco companies have become innovative in the use of social media on the Internet to promote their deadly wares. They continue to sponsor and undertake “research” in the guise of

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health promotion or harm minimization. Not surprisingly, the outcome is in increasing rates of uptake of smoking in children. No academic institution should accept tobacco sponsorship and this journal joins almost all health and medical journals in reaffirming its policy of not accepting any article that has had tobacco industry funding. Public health advocates need to be equally innovative in using new forms of media that are important to our youth to combat the subtle promotion of killer tobacco.

Tobacco control has involved 2 traditional public health strategies: abstinence or harm reduction. The problem with harm reduction is that any smoking conditions the strong forces of addiction and there is limited evidence of public health benefit from merely reducing the amount of smoking. The Asia-Pacific Academic Consortium for Public Health (APACPH) has always supported public health efforts to eliminate tobacco from the community.

This year, APACPH, the owner of this journal, will hold its annual conference in Bandung, Indonesia (see www.APACPH2015.org). Indonesia has one of the highest rates of smoking in the world and public health institutions and health workers need support in combatting this public health menace. The emphasis of “World No Tobacco Day” this year is on ending the illicit trade of tobacco products. The WHO has suggested 2 objectives for academic institutions, including Schools of Public Health:

1. Undertake research on the subject of the illicit trade of tobacco products to further document its harmful impacts, as well as the benefits to health, state finances and the control of criminal activities of curbing the trade of illicit tobacco products.
2. Research into the active role that the tobacco industry plays in supporting the illicit tobacco trade.10

The APACPH Conference is an opportunity to reinforce our commitment to the abolition of tobacco addiction in our region to reduce its impact on the health of the public. We need to support our colleagues in the Schools of Public Health in Indonesia as they battle against the number one public health issue in our region, the scourge of tobacco. According to the WHO report, 72% of adult males in Indonesia were smokers in 2007. This presents a huge health and economic burden on the country. The WHO Tobacco report states that

In both Indonesia and Senegal, most of the public basketball courts in these countries’ cities are painted with the logos of cigarette brands. In Indonesia, which has yet to become a party to the WHO FCTC, several youth friendly international music stars have performed in concerts sponsored by tobacco companies. Indonesia does not have bans on television or radio advertising.10(p25)

Your editors will be at Bandung and will be running a workshop on writing academic papers and getting your work published. We will also be available to discuss your plans for publication of your research data in this journal. We hope to meet you there.

References