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Changing Attitudes Toward Smoking

The attitudes of the people of the United States toward cigarette smoking are undergoing a major change. In the 30-year period prior to 1964, per capita consumption of cigarettes tripled. During the last 4 years, per capita consumption of cigarettes has leveled off, and currently it may be dropping. The 1964 Surgeon General's Advisory Committee report entitled "Smoking and Health" was a major milestone. The report set in motion developments that ultimately will have a profound effect. One consequence was the stimulation of research bearing upon the effects of smoking. A recent compendium lists 364 projects in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and 25 foreign countries.

Out of this research activity has come substantial evidence that the effects of smoking are even more serious than was stated in the 1964 report. Highlights of the findings have been presented in a new U.S. Public Health Service document.* The most striking finding is that "the life expectancy for a two-pack a day, or more, smoker at age 25 is 8.3 years less than [that for] the corresponding non-smoker."

The 1964 report probably has influenced the smoking habits of physicians. At one time many of them were heavy smokers. A recent survey† indicates that 100,000 physicians have stopped smoking cigarettes. Of all the physicians surveyed, 35 percent had never smoked, 36 percent had smoked at one time but had stopped, and only 29 percent were still smoking. In contrast, 52 percent of the general adult male population currently smoke cigarettes.

The survey also indicates that physicians are deeply concerned over the effects of smoking. More than 90 percent stated that they associate smoking with chronic bronchitis, lung cancer, and emphysema, and almost as many associate it with peripheral vascular disease and coronary artery disease. The responses of physicians who have stopped smoking are revealing. When asked on the survey questionnaire why they stopped, 60 percent checked "Protect my future health," 47 percent checked "Occurrence of certain symptoms," and 43 percent checked "Scientific reports convinced me."

Directly and indirectly, the 1964 report has affected the attitudes of teenagers. Another survey‡ indicates that 91 percent of this group believe that smoking is harmful to health, while only 4 percent believe it is not. Only 2.6 percent of the entire sample said they definitely expect to become cigarette smokers 5 years from now, while 45.1 percent said they do not expect to be smokers. Another 12.3 percent said they probably will be smokers, while 34.2 percent said they probably will not be. Other studies have shown that young people in junior and senior high school are likely to predict accurately what they eventually will do. Thus the new survey indicates an important new pattern of behavior.

Another consequence of the 1964 report was the enactment of a Federal Labeling and Advertising Act. This act required, among other things, that each package of cigarettes distributed in the United States bear a warning label. The Federal Trade Commission now recommends that legislation be enacted to make the warning much stronger. The FTC also has called for legislation banning cigarette advertising on radio and television. It seems unlikely that this will be enacted soon. The tobacco industry has many friends, and it spends more than \$300 million annually on advertising. In contrast, those seeking to publicize harmful effects of smoking have only limited access to radio and TV. Nevertheless, the weight of the facts is against cigarettes, and in the end the facts will prevail.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

* "The Health Consequences of Smoking: 1968 Supplement to the 1967 Public Health Service Review," *U.S. Public Health Service Publication* (1968). † Dorothy E. Green and Daniel Horn, "Physicians' Attitude toward Their Involvement in Smoking Problems of Patients," paper presented at the National Forum on Office Management of Smoking Problems, Chicago, April 1968. ‡ Daniel Horn, "Current Smoking among Teenagers," paper presented at the American Cancer Society's Science Writers' Seminar, San Diego, Calif., March 1968.