

Smoke Screens

Tobacco generates many kinds of smoke, some of which screen the special interests of a diverse number of groups. It is a major source of tax revenue on which politicians depend for dispensing their largess. It is a major US crop and, therefore, is bread and butter for many farmers. It is the principal product of a large industry, which translates into jobs and stock dividends. Finally, it is a major cause of illness and helps to keep the physician's appointment book filled. Recent announcements by the media exposed these many fascinating facets of tobacco and for a few days generated more heat than smoke in our editorial office.

Most physicians regard cigarette smoking as a major contributing factor to the occurrence of lung cancer, emphysema, myocardial infarction, and several other diseases we would prefer did not exist. The best advice that a physician can give to a patient is, "Do not smoke!" However, human nature being what it is, a great many people do not follow good advice and believe that smoking is one of life's pleasures that they cannot do without. It is for the small benefit of such people that we publish "Toward a Less Hazardous Cigarette" (p 1255) in this issue of THE JOURNAL. Gio B. Gori, PhD, and Cornelius J. Lynch, PhD, the authors, are careful not to use the words "safe" or "safer" either in the title or in the body of the article. The whole emphasis is on a less hazardous not a safer cigarette.

However, Drs Gori and Lynch have made some assumptions with which many readers will not agree. First they assume that the harm done by cigarettes correlates directly with their content or production of tar, nitrogen oxides, hydrogen cyanide, acrolein, and carbon monoxide and that if these substances are reduced in amount, then so is the risk of illness. This assumption might be valid if we have identified all the toxins produced by burning tobacco and if the threshold theory of toxic action, not the linear theory, is correct. Actually, most scientists believe that there is no threshold below which mutagens, carcinogens, and similar damaging agents are safe. They hold that a linear relationship exists from no exposure on up and that if enough people are exposed, a few will exhibit the damaging effects no matter how small the dose. If this is true, there never can be a safe cigarette.

However, a good deal more interesting than the Gori and Lynch article itself were the perturbations surrounding its publication. The article was accepted on March 31, 1978, and until Aug 11, 1978, no publication date had been set, nor had

the article even been set in galley proof. However, on Aug 9 a series of events brought this article's existence to the attention of the press. In July, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Joseph Califano, Jr, made a public statement condemning cigarette smoking as a major cause of illness. This understandably upset the tobacco industry and some representatives of the tobacco-growing states. On Aug 6 President Carter countered Secretary Califano in a speech in North Carolina in which he called for more research to make smoking of tobacco even more safe than it is today. This speech to tobacco growers would have brightened future promotional campaigns on behalf of cigarette smoking had the American Medical Association not tarnished the event by issuing its 365-page summary report on 14 years of research on the health hazards of tobacco. Although all the research reported in this volume had already appeared in the literature, the summary itself was issued coincidentally with President Carter's speech. The industry cried "foul" and went in search of further scientific support for their product. A few days later, the press was outside Dr Gori's office seeking a news release on an article accepted by THE JOURNAL, which was supposed to confirm that today's cigarettes are safe. The press, radio, and television gave this hoped for bit of news full coverage, wasted two days of this editor's time, and advanced the publication of the Gori and Lynch article by at least a month. One more publishing experience like this and I may take up the cigarette habit myself, for many addicts to the weed claim that it has a quieting effect on the nerves.

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Superselective Angiography

One of the burgeoning costs of medical treatment is that of radiography. Yet through recent advances in the field (p 1283), it is now possible radiologically to visualize minute ramifications of branches of the arterial tree. To attain this achievement has required costly research and apparatus, and to apply the new techniques to diagnosis and treatment is unquestionably expensive. But see what it gives in return!

Patients, otherwise normal, who have disfiguring congenital malformations of the face and head now can be examined and treated. Radiological techniques permit us not only to look at the blood supply to these lesions but also to occlude or embolize these vessels of supply with the use of pledgets of gelatin foam or plastic globules. Such treatment can, by itself,