

T O B A C C O I O I

A TOBACCO AND NICOTINE TUTORIAL

By John Slade, M.D.

*A different subject is featured in this column in each issue of The Nicotine Challenger.
Please send questions or suggestions for topics to Dr. Slade at the Tobacco Dependence Program.*

New Jersey's tobacco control program compared with the best state programs

The cigarette kills half of continuing smokers, and the vast majority of those who smoke, regret having started and want to stop. At the same time, public health and clinical efforts to reduce tobacco use work. They save lives, especially the lives of people who do not want to be the customers of the cigarette manufacturers.

The cigarette industry spends \$150 million each year to market their deadly, addictive products in New Jersey, persuading people to start and continue smoking, by saying, in effect, that it is a great thing to do. The industry is concerned with selling product, so it cynically minimizes concerns and pretends that its products are fine. After all, if there were a really bad problem with cigarettes, they wouldn't be legal, right?

Addictive? Philip Morris, RJ Reynolds, Brown & Williamson and Lorillard play with the word. The litany they use is that they only want to sell to adults who chose to smoke. The audacity of this pious assertion is breathtaking. If they actually were to limit cigarette sales to this group, to those who freely choose to smoke, their customer base would be enormously reduced.

Up against this polished juggernaut, New Jersey's Department of Health and Senior Services is beginning to spend \$30 million per year on efforts to reduce tobacco use in the state. This money comes directly out of the pockets of smokers, whose purchases of cigarettes finance the manufacturers' payments under the Master Settlement Agreement on a pay-as-you-go basis. Over time, if DHSS puts in the field a good mix of programs, media and policies, the program will reduce tobacco use in the state and save lives.

We know this can be done because it has already been done in California and in Massachusetts.

In California, a state-funded tobacco control program has been in operation since 1989. That program, funded at about \$3.75 per capita, has reduced tobacco use in the state by a third and has cut lung cancer deaths by 14%. An estimated 33,300 Californians did not die of heart disease between 1990 and 1997 because of the program.


In Massachusetts, a similar program got underway about 5 years later than the program in California. There, the funding was more generous, up to \$7 per capita. Massachusetts experienced a more rapid reduction in tobacco use than did California, so in only a few years, it saw a 1/3 reduction in tobacco use. The

daily adult cigarette smoking rate in Massachusetts is now less than 15%, the lowest of any state in the nation, and lower than that of any country in the world.

California's program has had its ups and downs, with changes in policies and in funding levels that seem to be directly related to the long arm of the tobacco companies' political influence. When the program was blunted, benefits became much smaller. Overall, the diminished effectiveness of the California program after 1992 resulted in 8,300 more deaths from cardiovascular disease than would have occurred had the program been permitted to continue on its pre-1992 trajectory.

A major feature of the programs in both California and Massachusetts has been a large and very visible media campaign to talk with the public at large about tobacco. This effort has provided a context for local community efforts and has helped motivate people to quit. It complements parts of the program that are specific for youth, making it clear that tobacco is a problem all ages have to wrestle with.

In New Jersey, the available funds are at about the same per capita level as those in California (and about half that of the current Massachusetts program), but the strategy adopted is one that focuses on young people to a greater extent than the California and Massachusetts programs. For instance, there are no current plans in New Jersey for mass media that provides general public education about tobacco, only an effort aimed at young people and a smaller effort directed towards publicizing the toll-free quitline and the quitnet internet service.

The proven formulas for large scale success are those of California and, especially, Massachusetts. Increased funding in New Jersey would facilitate expansion into a broader education campaign for all ages and would lead to more rapid, Massachusetts-style reductions in tobacco use. Lives are at stake. New Jersey's tobacco control program is off to a good start, but it can be much stronger with additional resources and a broader vision. 

Note: For more information about California's experience, see Stanton A. Glantz and Edith D. Balbach, Tobacco War, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000. Full text available on line at <http://escholarship.edlib.org/ucpress/tobacco-war.xml>.

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