

NO OBJECTIONS TO YOUR SMOKING, ONLY TO YOUR SMOKE

By Reuven Bar-Levav, M. D.

At a time when seemingly more important problems confront our profession it appears frivolous to write an article about smoking. Yet, in spite of wide-spread knowledge about the many serious dangers to health and the undesirability of smoking, physicians still smoke not only in the privacy of their homes but also in hospitals, in their offices while seeing patients and at medical society meetings. What consenting adults do in private without offending or endangering others is their own business. But smoking was always a smelly habit that smokers inflicted on non-smokers in public and without their consent. It is, at the least, grossly inconsiderate to penetrate without license the life space of others and to rudely intrude upon them with smoke or otherwise. It is incomprehensible that physicians would do so, especially when they serve in their professional capacity. Smoking is everybody's right, but infringing with unsolicited smoke on the rights of others is not.

A leading cigarette manufacturer has just sent letters to physicians around the country offering them "free" cartons of cigarettes as a thinly veiled bribe for tacit endorsement. Such letters would not have been sent to physicians except for their known tolerance of this self-destructive and vile habit. Civilized society considers it highly inappropriate to publicly emit air from other body orifices, but somehow it still accepts foul and smoky air blown out of noses and mouths straight into the face and onto the food of others. All such emissions may be smelly, but smoke is additionally also hazardous to one's well being. The apathy and tolerance of non-smokers allows smokers to continue their inconsiderate behavior in public, causing health hazards both to themselves and to others, who are unilaterally forced to suffer by inhaling contaminated and stinky air.

Smoking should, by right, be banned from all public places. Spittoons and cuspidors were common fifty years ago, but no one would consider it proper to spit in public today. Ashtrays should be relegated to the same position. To start with, smoking should no longer be permitted at any medical meeting, in physicians offices or anywhere in hospitals. The Michigan State Medical Society has actually passed a resolution several years ago forbidding smoking at any of its official functions. Special interests put pressure upon the legislature in Lansing to compromise their anti-smoking bills. The medical profession ought to enforce a more sensible rule of restraint upon itself.

This writer urges every reader who agrees with this position to write to the Wayne County Medical Society Council, requesting it to pass a resolution to this effect. Write briefly, but right now.