Tobacco companies mounted "dirty tricks" campaign against WHO

Judy Jones *London*

Dirty tricks campaigns were used by tobacco companies as part of a prolonged and orchestrated drive to subvert the World Health Organization's anti-smoking strategy, an inquiry panel established by the organisation has found. The inquiry showed that the tobacco industry developed elaborate strategies to manipulate public opinion against the WHO, discredit key individuals, infiltrate its structure, and arranged media events to divert attention away from potentially damaging stories.

Some strategies succeeded in influencing WHO activities, causing "significant harm" to the organisation and its objectives. The inquiry's report states: "Of greatest concern, tobacco companies have, in some cases, had their own consultants in positions at WHO,

paying them to serve the goals of tobacco companies while working for the WHO. Some of these cases raise serious questions about whether the integrity of WHO decision-making has been compromised."

The subversion strategy, mounted in the late 1980s and into the 1990s, sought to make allies of developing countries and convince them that loss of tobacco as a cash crop would destabilise their economies and increase the burden of poverty and malnutrition.

The inquiry was established last year by Gro Harlem Brundtland, director general of the WHO, and led by Thomas Zeltner, director of the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. The release of millions of pages of tobacco company documents, as a result of lawsuits in the United States, enabled the "scale and

intensity" of the industry's efforts to be revealed. They showed, the report says, that the companies "viewed the WHO as one of their leading enemies, and that they saw themselves in a battle against the WHO."

Many documents point to the significant role of Paul Dietrich, an American lawyer with long term ties to tobacco companies. The report says that he wrote many articles and editorials attacking WHO priorities that were published in major media outlets and that he gave presentations to journalists and government officials about "inappropriate spending" by the WHO. The documents show that after Mr Dietrich was appointed to a key WHO development committee in 1990, he was both billing British American Tobacco (BAT) for a monthly consultation fee and trying to divert the organisation's activities away from tobacco control.

"Dietrich's media program was created to promote the position that health spending in Latin America should not go to tobacco control initiatives, but to

other pressing public health issues such as children's immunisation programs and AIDS prevention programs. The program called for popular US entertainer Gloria Esterfan to star in a widely televised show advocating the 'importance of vaccinating children' on a Save the Children tour near the time of the conference. A memo from Dietrich to BAT spelled out how this event would assist the tobacco companies." When challenged by the inquiry, Dietrich denied knowingly participating in any tobacco industry event or project, and denied being paid by the industry for his work.

The report recommends further investigation by other United Nations agencies and member countries, and the development of a sophisticated communications strategy to support the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. (See editorial p 314.) □

Tobacco Company Strategies to Undermine Tobacco Control Activities at the WHO can be accessed at www.who.int

Smoking in parents increases meningococcal disease risk

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

The risk of invasive meningococcal disease in children is strongly influenced by parental smoking and unfavourable socioeconomic circumstances, according to new research.

The largest increase in risk—more than eightfold—was among children of parents who both smoked, although researchers warned this may be an over estimate because such families are likely to have multiple social disadvantage not covered by the study's adjustment for those factors.

The research found that children in households where 20 cigarettes a day were smoked were 2.6 times more likely to develop meningococcal disease than children in the control groups.

The study, published in the *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2000;83:117-21) examined all the cases of invasive meningococcal disease diagnosed over 18 months in 35 districts of the Czech Republic. A total of 71 cases were identified in children under 15 years.

To each case, two controls were matched by age, sex, district, and place of origin (urban or rural). The controls were recruited from healthy children at the same schools as the cases. The authors said that the proportion of smoking parents was substantially higher among cases than controls.

They identified several socioeconomic factors, notably maternal education, as being important in determining risk of the disease. The report also points to a number of biological possibilities put forward for a link between smoking and meningococcal disease.

The authors stated: "Exposure to smoke causes direct damage to the nasopharyngeal mucosa. Passive smoking is associated with increased risk of respiratory disease in young children." □

Liz Hurley sucks to stop smoking

Ron Davis *BMJ*

During a recent photography shoot for a cosmetics advertisement on the Caribbean island of St Bartholomew, actress and model Liz Hurley was caught by paparazzi sunbathing topless—and sucking on a baby's pink dummy.

It emerged that the dummy was Ms Hurley's latest method for giving up the half a pack of Marlboro Lights she smokes each day. A spokeswoman for Ms Hurley explained that nicotine patches did not seem to work for her. The idea for the dummy, she said, came from Desmond Morris's book *Manwatching*, which "equated smoking with a baby's desire to be breast fed."

Mr Morris was pleased to hear that Ms Hurley had taken his advice: "Only someone like Liz, whom I've never met, could make something like a dummy

Elizabeth Hurley and dummy

look chic and trendy. As far as I know she's the only person to have taken up my idea to suck on a dummy to fight the urge to light up."

Actor Hugh Grant, Ms Hurley's former boyfriend, confirmed that she was an addicted smoker. "Elizabeth smokes four thousand cigarettes a day. I've caught her with cigarettes in her nostrils," he told *Esquire* magazine last September. □