
Searching for an Indicator of the Influence of the Tobacco Lobby on Politicians

To the Editor: Bansal-Travers et al.¹ examined the impact of cigarette pack design and pictorial health warnings used by governments to communicate directly to consumers. In its comprehensive policy, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which came into force in 2005, specifically called for the implementation of health warnings on tobacco packaging covering at least 30% (ideally 50% or more) of the display areas that may include pictures or pictograms.²

The “Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act” gave the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco products and specified an increase in warning label size to 50% of the pack face and the inclusion of graphic images alongside the text of warning labels.³ This 50% seems shy when compared to the 80% rule in Uruguay or 75% in Canada.

France was the first of the old Members of the European Union to ratify the FCTC treaty in October 2004, but it was only the 39th country to enforce the recommendation about pictures on packages in 2011. Indeed, the government allowed the death industry an unbelievable 2 years for discussions plus a 1-year delay to allow for the sales of the stock. Last but not least, the required size is only 30% of the front.

Health warnings on cigarette packs are one of the powerful tools for tobacco control. This is the reason why the giant Philip Morris (market capitalization of \$107 billion) filed a complaint with the World Bank’s International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes against the little courageous Uruguay (gross domestic product of \$44 billion). However, the tobacco industry prefers preven-

tive measures, and its contributions to political parties strongly influence the behavior of politicians to preclude the implementation of tobacco-control policies.⁴ Accordingly, we suggest that the size of health warnings on a cigarette pack may be inversely correlated to the influence of the tobacco lobby on politicians.

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Dr. Braillon, a senior tenured consultant, was fired in 2010 from Pr Dubois’s unit by the French Department of Health against the advice of the National Statutory Committee, while Pr Dubois was being sued for libel by the French Tobacconists Union (Abuse of libel laws and a sacking: The gagging of public health experts in France. Tobacco Control Blog, November 8, 2010).

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