

Neither Abusiveness with Patients nor Naivety with Drugs



To the Editor:

Kelly et al¹ must be commended for condemning abusive language for individuals with addiction (eg, substance “abusers” or “addicts”) and recommending the use of “people with a substance use disorder.” Indeed, reducing stigma is vital for building the therapeutic alliance with these patients with low self-esteem. Sadly, this is not yet usual: Elkind,² when discussing the risk of recurrent ischemic stroke, called smoking a “volitional behavior.” However, the condemnation of public health messages such as “war on drugs” or “You use, you lose” deserves comments.

First, war refers to the drug and those who benefit from it. Cigarette smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths annually in the United States. This can be compared with the 405,399 US military deaths during World War II (1941-1945). Australia is in the war; it has implemented plain packaging. Brazil is in the war; it has banned menthol, and this is on the agenda in Europe. In contrast, despite the fact that the 2009 Tobacco Control Act has given the Food and Drug Administration the authority to regulate tobacco,

its Advisory Committee chose not to recommend a ban on menthol cigarettes despite all the evidence of its devastating effects. This is a major setback for public health. Current cigarette smoking among adults in the United States only decreased from 20.9% in 2005 to 17.8% in 2013. Accordingly, the Healthy People 2010 objective (prevalence of cigarette smoking among adults to 12%) will not be attained before 2030. Is it surprising that smoking prevalence is highest in Kentucky and West Virginia (30%), where tobacco farms are concentrated? War must be declared, and collaboration with the *enemy* condemned.

Second, is the message “You use, you lose” inappropriate? Alcohol leads to 88,000 deaths each year in the United States. Too many people cannot drink in moderation. Is it abusiveness to warn those who choose to drink that they have a high probability to lose? The recommendation of moderation only serves the alcohol industry interests!

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References

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2. Elkind MSV. Outcomes after stroke: risk of recurrent ischemic stroke and other events. *Am J Med.* 2009;122:S7-S13.

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