

## Letters to the Editor

*The journal publishes both invited and unsolicited letters.*

### REVERSING THE TAXES APPROACH FOR A WIN-WIN TOBACCO CONTROL POLICY

Increasing the price of cigarettes is a core ingredient of comprehensive tobacco control [1]. There is long-standing evidence of the effectiveness of increased tobacco prices for reducing tobacco consumption. In developed countries, a roughly 10% rise in price decreases sales by 4% [2].

Therefore, tobacco tax increases apparently offer a win-win solution, because states will collect more taxes and the burden of smoking-related illnesses will decrease [3].

France has become an exception among rich countries by flying in the face of this evidence. In 2004 Jean Pierre Raffarin, Jacques Chirac's Prime Minister, announced a freeze on tobacco taxes for 4 years—'a good compromise', according to the president of the Tobacconists Union. On 30 May 2011 Xavier Bertrand, the Minister of Health, announced that he will maintain the freeze, even though France has seen a 2% increase in smoking prevalence during the past 5 years. Warnings from public health experts have fallen on deaf ears. Accordingly, turnover of the tobacco industry has shown a 3% rise from 2008 to 2009, despite the global economic crisis. The French government seems more interested in promoting the profits of the tobacco industry than in the health of its people. Ironically, it would probably pay governments to hand money over to the tobacco industry to incentivize a reduction their turnover. The turnover of the tobacco industry in France is about €1 billion, while at the same time France spends €47 billion a year treating smoking-related illnesses and only collects €12 billion in taxes [4]. Each Euro paid to the shareholders represents €10 paid by the smoker and a cost of €350 to the community (the cost of treating smoking-related illnesses minus collected taxes). If the state were to pay €10 to the shareholders for each €10 decrease in tobacco industry turnover, it would save €340 for the community. A Pay4Decrease plan of this kind is unlikely ever to be put into place and would no doubt have unintended adverse consequences, but the arithmetic shows how much damage the tobacco industry is doing to society and the dereliction in duty of governments such as that in France, who are not engaging with even the most basic policies to protect their citizens.

#### Declarations of interest

Dr Braillon, a senior tenured consultant in Public Health was sacked in 2010 from Amiens University Hospital by

the French Department of Health against the advice of the National Statutory Committee (Abuse of libel laws and a sacking: the gagging of public health experts in France. Tobacco control blog, 8 November 2010: <http://blogs.bmj.com/tc/2010/11/08/>) (Archived by Webcite at <http://www.webcitation.org/617xxNddg>).

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### EQUITY CONSIDERATIONS IN THE CALCULATION OF COST-EFFECTIVENESS IN SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER POPULATIONS

Epidemiological modelling is an important method for estimating the long-term impact of behavioural or medical interventions on the course of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic through calculation of HIV infections prevented, and quality adjusted life years (QALYs) saved. These models often analyse marginalized populations, such as men who have sex with men (MSM) or injecting drug users (IDUs), and their results depend