

DR. MICOZZI'S

INSIDERS' CURES

The Day Science went UP IN SMOKE

**And why the right amount of tobacco could
*actually be good for you***

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I'd just started working at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in 1984 when it happened. They announced that, from then on, funding for lung cancer research would go only to smoking cessation and prevention. You see, it seems the “experts” at the NCI had decided they knew “*the*” cause of lung cancer. And the smoking gun pointed to, well...smoking.

It's true that about 1 in 10 lifelong smokers eventually develop lung cancer. But what about the 1 in 100 non-smokers who get lung cancer? What causes *their* disease?

It seems we'll never know. Because research on the biology of lung cancer was forever frozen in 1984. And what makes it worse is that modern cancer treatments, even with all their well-known drawbacks, remain notoriously ineffective at treating lung cancer.

The “smoking gun” study the Feds don't want you see

Shortly thereafter, I got a chance to work with a team of great young scientists. We were analyzing data from the largest study ever done on health, including smoking. Most previous studies just lumped all smokers (cigarettes, cigars, and pipes) together. But this study was so large we could separate out cigar (only) and pipe (only) smokers from cigarette smokers. And even divide cigarette smokers into different groups accordingly by half-packs per day. And here's what we found...

Smoking had virtually no measurable effect for people who smoked half a pack per day or less. (But they *were*

closer to maintaining a healthy body weight, however!) And cigar and pipe smokers? You'd better sit down for this one...

They were actually healthier overall than *non-smokers*!

I thought then (and still think now) that there might be a simple explanation for this “shocking” phenomenon...

Nature's oldest stress reducer

Moderate smoking can be relaxing. And most chronic diseases are ultimately being linked to stress in some way. So it's not unreasonable to consider that there might be a benefit—or at least a benign effect—to light smoking.

In fact, not long after we did this research, other scientists found similar results for alcohol. That moderate alcohol consumption reduces the risk of many chronic diseases. And I believe it's for the same reason.

Both alcohol and tobacco have been nature's own stress-reducers since early human civilizations. Native Americans long grew, used, and revered tobacco for its medicinal and “peaceful” effects. It was, in fact, a medicinal plant. And for centuries, many responsible adults were able to enjoy a cigarette, or two, or a pipe or cigar, after a meal without becoming chain smokers.

So, what happened?

Bad science, bad advice

Well, “behavioral science” was all the rage in the 1980s. And the Feds really believe that if they spend enough of our

money on getting people to adjust their behavior—i.e. quit smoking—the lung cancer problem would incredibly just vanish. Go “up in smoke,” if you will.

As a physician and anthropologist, I should have been thrilled to see behavioral science coming into its own. Except for two things...

First, I was troubled by the fact that there was no real science behind this government approach to solving the lung cancer problem. And, second, behavioral science (especially a la the U.S. government) was to science what military music is to music. It’s kind of like what you get when “health science” is taught in public schools by the gym teacher—science with a government agenda.

Many of my medical school and graduate school professors were clear-minded scientists. And confided to me that they were downright horrified by this trend.

But, much to all our dismay, it continued

In fact, years later, I was set to meet with some of the government’s top health officials about my new national health education program on public science literacy. I was on time, but their previous meeting was running late. They were all genuinely good guys, and invited me to join them while they finished discussing the prior topic on their agenda. And that topic was the effects of “passive smoking” in children. (Like when parents smoke around their kids, or when people are “exposed” to second-hand smoke in restaurants.)

It turned out those just-completed studies remained in-

conclusive. That is, no one could really say whether or not second-hand smoke had any effect on health. There was some discussion. And then these respected health professionals made a unanimous decision. That they would go ahead and interpret the data as showing a clear effect. In other words, they'd go on the record saying that second-hand smoke causes health problems. That way, they argued, Congress would be motivated to pass stronger anti-smoking legislation. And that they did.

Welcome to politically correct government science.

Your built-in defenses to smoke

The idea that humans have zero tolerance for exposure to smoke is ridiculous. Human ancestors probably spent the better part of the last million years living in caves inhaling smoke from open fires.

The fact is, the lungs have many built-in defenses against smoke. I did research on one such defense as a student in the 1970s. It's called alpha-one anti-trypsin. A genetic deficiency or abnormality of this enzyme causes emphysema. It is also entirely likely that genetic absence or deficiency of other key lung enzymes contributes to risk for lung cancer in smokers. But now we will never know thanks to politically correct government science.

If the effects of second-hand smoke are inconclusive...If smoking half-a-pack a day or less has no measurable effect on health...And if cigar and pipe smokers are actually healthier than non-smokers...Then why should responsible, moderate, adult smokers be demonized, ostracized, socially stigmatized, and scared to death by false, politically correct

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government posturing, and abolitionist laws and regulations, and confiscatory “sin” taxes?

Please, don’t get me wrong. I’m not in favor of tobacco abuse, or chain smoking. But I am in favor of clear science.

As a taxpayer, you deserve to be told the truth about tobacco. The REAL truth. Not the politically correct version.

Perhaps it’s time for the NCI to stop focusing just on that 1 smoker in 10 who does get lung cancer. And start asking why 9 out of 10 smokers never get lung cancer? Or why 1 in 100 who never smoked get lung cancer anyway? Then we might actually learn some more *real science*, instead of just how to be politically correct.

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