

Stronger push needed against tobacco advertising

By Gina Pitts

'BAN Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship' is the theme of this year's World No Tobacco Day.

Understanding the tobacco industry's practices is crucial for the success of tobacco control policies. In this context, it's important also to understand that tobacco products are the only legally available products that can kill up to one half of their regular users if consumed as recommended by the manufacturer (WHO).

The complexity of marketing and subliminal nature of the feed means that most of the general public are unaware of the measures taken by the tobacco industry to sell their products. This is of major concern for our children who need to be protected from this level of marketing. Barbados has

exposure to cross-border advertising which can be seen by viewers. This is likely to be quite a problem for us here, given the array of TV channels which we can access; particularly those from the USA, which has a different approach to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

The FCTC requires, amongst other conditions, that countries that have ratified to introduce legislation to ban tobacco advertising. Whilst effectively in Barbados there is a voluntary ban on tobacco advertising in place, this is not enforceable at law. The Heart & Stroke Foundation continues to lobby Government to introduce legislation to ban such tobacco promotion and advertising.

Additionally, we need to ensure that measures are put in place to curb the threat of cross-border advertising. Internet



Gina Pitts, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados

advertising using modern technology is a very real problem, but filtering devices have been developed that can be used by operators

such as ISPs and mobile phone operators and/or offered to end-users. There will be a need to regulate technology providers but carefully

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so as not to remove everything. This will need input from the CSME once all Caribbean countries have ratified the FCTC to ensure conformity.

Effective policies such as a ban on tobacco advertising in public places and workplaces are imminently feasible. As more and more countries ratify the FCTC and strengthen the regulatory framework around tobacco use and promotion, tobacco companies will operate more aggressively in those countries where regulations are weaker. Barbados may be a prime target given its high visibility as a tourist destination, particularly in light of the forthcoming World Cup events in golf and cricket. If Barbados waits for the multinational tobacco companies to more aggressively promote their products and lobby against tobacco control

measures, the task of tobacco control will become much more difficult.

Nevertheless, it is an economical myth to think that the implementation of particularly smoking-free environments will result in lost business to restaurants and bars and affects the jobs of people. Various studies showed that smoking bans have not had a negative impact on business or the economy.

With smoking and alcohol abuse shown as a major risk factor for heart attacks and stroke, the Heart and Stroke Foundation continues to advocate for the reduction and cessation of tobacco consumption. Should you wish assistance in giving up smoking then please contact us on 437-3312, giving your name and contact number.

(Gina Pitts is the CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados Inc.)