

TRANSFORMATION OF THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Mathers et al. addressed a critical emerging issue: the importance of harm reduction products as smoking cessation tools.¹ The implications could affect more than a billion smokers.² Here I address four issues covered by the authors: (1) the potential of harm reduction to substantially reduce the burden of disease, (2) the importance of China, (3) the power of market forces, and (4) the independence of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW).

First, a recent report provided evidence that tobacco harm reduction could substantially contribute to ending smoking.³ The findings of an FSFW-supported report suggest that current smoking cessation tools and services produce very low quit rates and that there are few novel cessation drugs in the pharmaceutical pipeline.⁴ New nicotine delivery systems may lead the way toward decreasing risks relative to combustible tobacco-related risks.

Second, the authors excluded from their discussion the state-owned Chinese National Tobacco Corporation. An FSFW analysis shows that this corporation has the

largest nicotine-related product retail volume (in cigarette stick equivalents) in the world, with a 38% volume share.⁵ A smoke-free world cannot be contemplated without the inclusion of China, which may be on the brink of change. It may not be long before China commits to ending combustible cigarette sales.

Third, as with all shifts in consumer behavior, progress requires attention to market forces. Technology innovation will cut risks, smarter regulations could support smokers in switching to tobacco harm reduction products, and science-based information on the true benefits and risks will create demand to change. As companies that sell deadly cigarettes today compete to lower risks via alternative nicotine products, rapid progress toward smoking cessation is to be expected, as evidenced by heat-not-burn products in Japan.⁶

Finally, the authors mischaracterize FSFW. We have incorporated into our legal framework the principles and criteria for accepting tobacco industry funding first recommended by Cohen et al. to ensure independence from tobacco industry influence.⁷ Our board of directors and our advisors are independent leaders in their fields. FSFW does not represent any tobacco industry. **AJPH**

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This letter was accepted March 25, 2019.
doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305110

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank David Janazzo for his valuable contribution and useful discussions. I also thank Ramla Benmaamar for her review of the letter.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author is president of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, funded by Philip Morris International (PMI).

The bylaws of the foundation preclude the author or other foundation staff or board members from accepting any remuneration from PMI and ensure its full independence in accordance with US laws and best practices recommended by leading academics.

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LEE ET AL. RESPOND

The Global Tobacco Control Research Program, Simon Fraser University, does not engage with tobacco industry representatives or affiliated organizations, including the Philip Morris International (PMI)-funded Foundation for a Smoke-Free World (FSFW). This stance is compliant with a World Health Organization statement issued in 2017¹ and reaffirmed in 2019 alongside more than 200 organizations and individuals,² rejecting claims in an open letter by Derek Yach, MBChB, MPH, to the World Health Organization Executive Board that the "Foundation has taken every measure to ensure that PMI does not influence our work."³

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