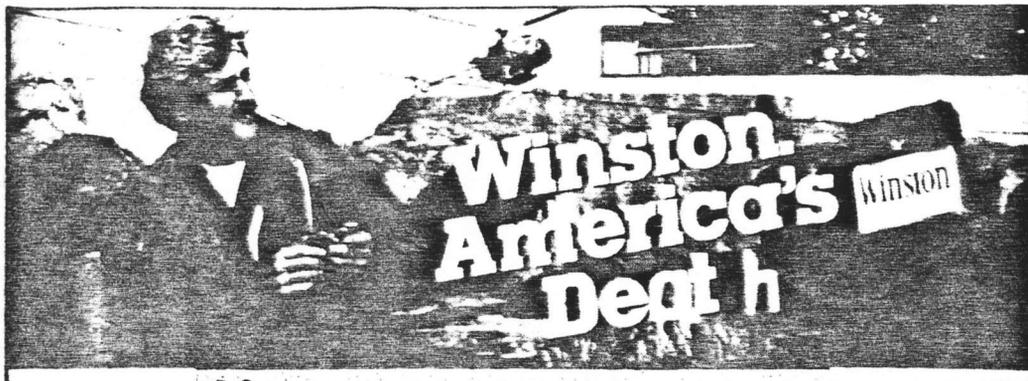


Doctors Deface Tobacco Industry



A billboard that used to read, 'Winston. America's Best,' as doctored by the mad medic, Michael Lippman (right).



SEATTLE

Police in Seattle hauled in a handful when they caught a man wearing surgical gloves hiding in the shadows of a cigarette billboard early one cold morning last December. The culprit was Michael Lippman, M.D., medical director of the North Seattle Public Health Center.

"It was my fourth billboard of the night," says Lippman. "I often 'reface' billboards when they're low to the ground and when I'm incensed. It's more fun than rock climbing."

Lippman had complained to the Seattle school board, which owns the land on which the billboard stands, but had gotten no satisfaction. The billboard featured one of those curly-blond-haired mustachioed macho men lighting up. To the slogan CAMEL LIGHTS: IT'S A WHOLE NEW WORLD, Lippman added: OF CANCER.

After his arrest, Lippman threatened to turn the case into a publicity stunt, so charges were dropped.

The mad medic models himself after an Australian group called Billboard Utilizing Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions (BUGAUP), which is, says Lippman, "10,000 billboards ahead of me."

"I look at the spread of cigarettes according to the med-

ical model," Lippman says. "Just as you would drain a swamp to get rid of mosquitoes that carry malaria, I go after the carrier of the disease—advertising."

Lippman is an active member of a group of more than 3,000 fuming medical doctors who call themselves DOC (for Doctors Ought to Care) based in Augusta, Georgia. Their goal is to satirize the advertising of unhealthy products aimed at children, and their principal targets are tobacco (TEN-YEAR SUPPLY—ONLY \$7,000) and alcohol (KILLER TIME), and sometimes junk food (COKE ADDS WEIGHT).

The doctors freely mix the lingo of medicine and Madison Avenue and use multimedia tactics:

† A DOC rock video shows a man with a Mohawk hairdo and Kiss makeup eating a handful of cigarettes. "I've had enough. I'm leaving you," his girlfriend snarls.

† A radio spot transforms New York Mayor Ed Koch's denunciation of gay bathhouses ("They are selling death") into a statement on cigarette companies. Koch approved the out-of-context use.

† DOC tennis tournaments parody tobacco-industry sponsorship with a clown named "Martina Nosmokanova," a "Marble Row" of cigarette deaths, and courtside

slogans such as SMOKERS ARE DYING TO BRING YOU TENNIS.

† DOC bus benches are designed to look like cigarette ads—same designs, same typefaces—but alter some of the words. The close of IF YOU SMOKE, PLEASE TRY CARLTON turns into PLEASE TRY TO QUIT, and IT'S THE RITZ becomes IT'S THE PITS.

DOC buys media time and space and sponsors speakers' bureaus for school classes on a shoestring budget, with volunteer time from member physicians. Many of them got interested when they were in medical school, tiring of seeing the same liver and lung ailments over and over. "When I was an intern working in clinics, two-thirds of the stuff was caused by tobacco and alcohol," says Rick Richards, current president of DOC. At the same time, independently, Alan Blum was doing anti-smoking bus benches in Miami. The two doctors met at a conference in Kansas City and founded DOC.

"We mostly satirize the image of sex and glamour," says Lippman. "Twelve-year-olds don't care about what's going to happen fifty years down the line. We tell them their breath will smell, their teeth will turn yellow, and they won't look like the people in the ads."

Counter-advertising seems to be the most effective ap-

proach, according to Blum. "The most dramatic decline in cigarette sales occurred between 1968 and 1970, when cigarette advertising and counter-advertising coexisted on television. In 1970, when televised cigarette advertising was 'banned' by Congress—at the behest of a tobacco industry alarmed at the success of counter-advertising among adolescents—the sales of cigarettes resumed an upward course."

So have smoking-related deaths. DOC claims that sales should never have been allowed at all, much less pushed on the public with multimillion-dollar ad budgets. "If it had been known forty years ago what is known now about the health risks of smoking, there's no way cigarettes would be allowed for sale," Blum says. "The American Medical Association is just now calling for a ban of cigarette ads. The Lung Association is just now protesting sponsorship of sports events. Nobody but DOC has demonstrated like this against an industry that is killing five times as many people as were killed in Hiroshima every year in this country."

—KIMBERLY FRENCH

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