

How do you sell death?

Roving exhibition exposes the tobacco menace to Jamaican students.

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Tobacco use is the single greatest preventable cause of death worldwide, killing half of the people who use it. In Jamaica, it is the single largest preventable factor contributing to the burden of disease and death.. According to the Jamaica National Household Survey (2001), commissioned by the National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA), one out of every five Jamaicans has used tobacco in their lifetime. Males are twice as likely as females to have ever used tobacco. With regard to current use, males are four times as likely to be smokers than females.¹ Tobacco causes respiratory harm and contributes to the development of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Additionally, non smokers are threatened by environmental smoke that contains cancer causing agents.² Therefore, tobacco use imposes tremendous costs on society both in terms of negative health consequences and economic burden.

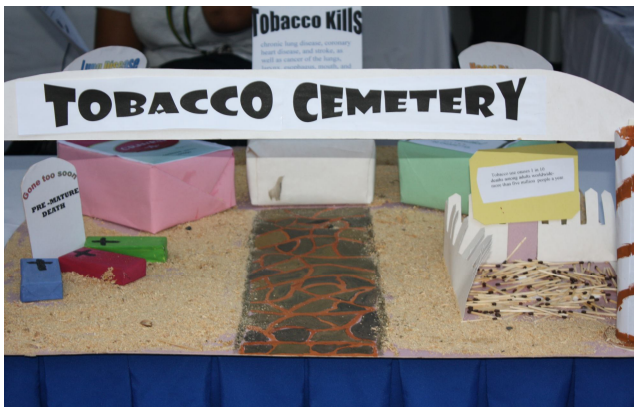
The world's first public health treaty was negotiated to respond to the need to combat the global tobacco epidemic. Jamaica is a signatory to this Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).³ The parties to the Convention agree that there are six effective control policies to counter the tobacco epidemic. These are to **monitor** tobacco use and prevention policies, **protect** people from tobacco smoke, **offer** help to quit tobacco use, **warn** about the dangers of tobacco, **enforce** bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and **raise** taxes on tobacco.(mpower).⁴ Further, health professionals are critical allies in the international effort to reduce the deadly tool of the tobacco epidemic.

The PAHO sponsored 2008 Global Health Professions Students Survey conducted by the NCDA revealed the willingness of Jamaican health professionals in training to tackle the problem of tobacco use.. Few of these nursing, pharmacy and medical students currently smoke, over 5 out of 10 are exposed to second hand smoke when in public spaces. The majority favours smoke free public spaces, including campuses. All respondents see the need to improve their training in the area of tobacco cessation.⁵



Students view standing exhibition “How do you sell death ?” mounted in the Calvin McKain Library at the University of Technology.

The findings of this survey provided a sound basis for mounting exhibitions on college campuses to stoke the interest of tertiary students and promote the value of tobacco cessation training. In November 2009, the NCDA, the College of Health Sciences and the Caribbean Institute of Pharmacy Practice Policy and Research (CIPPPAR) at the University of Technology mounted an exhibition under the theme, **“How do you sell death?”**



The Tobacco Cemetery highlights the deadly consequences of tobacco use in the “How do you sell death” exhibition at the Calvin McKain Library, University of Technology, Kingston, Jamaica

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The exhibition exposes viewers to several facts about the tobacco industry. Tobacco use will lead to 8 million deaths per year by 2030 if current trends continue. Estimates suggest that tobacco will kill 175 million persons worldwide and more than three quarters of these deaths will be in poor and middle income countries. Knowledge about the dangers of tobacco use is high. However, tobacco addicts find it difficult to quit because of the addictiveness of nicotine, the active ingredient in tobacco. Moreover, the tobacco industry spends billions of dollars per year to market tobacco and engages in subtle but effective strategies to recruit new users who will replenish the tobacco using market.⁶

There are links between smoking both tobacco and cannabis.⁷ Additionally, research has found that tobacco when smoked with marijuana increases the amount of tetrahydrocannabinol inhaled per gram of cannabis across a specific dose range.⁸ Smoking tobacco with or after cannabis use, increases the symptoms of cannabis dependence⁹.

The exhibition features three dimensional depictions of the deadly consequences of tobacco use with a centre piece titled, “The Tobacco Cemetery.” Health warnings from all over the world provide a graphic backdrop. Persons in attendance receive memorabilia such as bookmarks and leaflets. Two national radio stations broadcast the launch of the exhibition on Monday, November 9, 2009. Members of the national anti-tobacco coalition including the Ministry of Health and the Environment, the Heart Foundation of Jamaica and the Caribbean Tobacco Control Project supported the event. Solidarity was expressed by the medical and academic community in Jamaica.

The Exhibition is mounted at the Calvin McKain Library on the UTech campus for 30 days. The NCDA intends to partner with other college libraries to mount the exhibition across Jamaica in 2010.

References:

¹ *National Household Survey*, Kingston, Jamaica, National Council on Drug Abuse, 2001.

² National Cancer Institute. *Health effects of exposure to environmental tobacco some: the report of the California Environmental Protection Agency*. Bethesda, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of health, National Cancer Institute; 1999.

³ *Framework Convention on Tobacco Control*: WHO, 2003

⁴ *WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic: The MPOWER package*, WHO, 2008. p.9.

⁵ *Global Health Professions Students Survey*, Kingston, Jamaica, National Council on Drug Abuse, 2008.

⁶ *WHO report on the global tobacco epidemic: The MPOWER package*, WHO, 2008. pp.14-18

⁷ Jan Copeland and Desiree Broughtwood, “Cannabis Use and related harms”, *Pharmagazine* vol. 10 , No 2 (2009), p.1.

⁸ Van Der Koy,F.,et al, “Cannabis smoke condensate 11: influence of tobacco on tetrahydrocannabinol levels”, *Inhalation Toxicology*, vol 21, 2009, pp.89-90.

⁹ Ream., G.L. et al. Smoking tobacco along with marijuana increases symptoms of cannabis dependence. *Drug and Alcohol dependence*, vol. 95, 2008, pp.199-208.