

August 29, 1996

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Abercrombie:

On behalf of the American Society of Internal Medicine (ASIM), I am writing to urge you to resist any efforts to weaken or delay implementation of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) final rule regulating nicotine in cigarettes as an addictive substance and restricting the advertising, promotion and sale of tobacco products to children.

Internists, who comprise the nation's largest medical specialty, are faced every day with the catastrophic, and entirely preventable health consequences of smoking and "smokeless" tobacco, often in patients who were lured into "experimenting" with tobacco use as teenagers by slick, well-targeted advertising campaigns. Despite the overwhelming body of medical evidence supporting the FDA's conclusion that nicotine in tobacco products is addictive and the fact that 1,000 of the 3,000 teenagers who begin smoking each day will die of tobacco-related disease, young people continue to be influenced by an industry which annually devotes billions of dollars to the glamorization of its products.

ASIM applauds the specific regulations which are included in the final rule: tobacco companies will no longer be allowed to sponsor sporting and entertainment events using their products' brand names; outdoor tobacco advertising will be prohibited in the vicinity of schools and playgrounds; tobacco advertising will be banned in magazines with high teen readership; age verification will be required for all over-the-counter sales and vending machine and other self-service sales will be limited to those places where minors are not allowed. These, and the rule's other initiatives are necessary measures aimed at improving the health and longevity of future generations by curtailing the industry's ability to promote and distribute its addictive products to our nation's children.

It is time for members of Congress to resist the pressure that has historically been exerted on them by those seeking to insure the availability of tobacco products to our nation's youngest consumers. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 70 percent of smokers ages 12-17 years already regret their decision to begin using tobacco.

We hope that you will join ASIM, numerous other health, medical, and children's groups, as well as your constituents -- the over 60% of adults in this country who believe that the tobacco industry encourages teenagers to smoke -- in supporting the FDA initiatives. ASIM believes that tobacco regulation is appropriately part of the core mission of the FDA. We strongly support implementation of the final rule which will prevent millions of children and adolescents from beginning a lifetime of debilitating and often fatal nicotine addiction.

Sincerely,

ANM

Alan Nelson, MD

Executive Vice President