

Tobacco: science, policy and public health

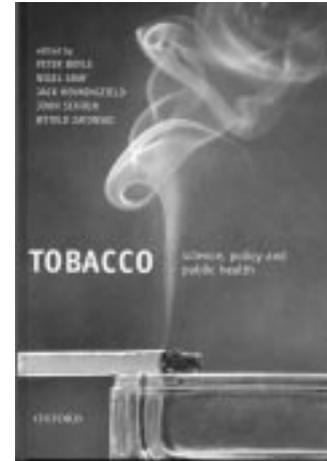
EDITORS P Boyle, N Gray, J Henningfield, J Seffrin, W Zatonski

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REVIEWER J Friend



This is a substantial, authoritative, multi-author book assembled by a distinguished group of editors. It is remarkably comprehensive, international in scope, and forms a detailed source of scientific information on the impact of tobacco use on health and on public health approaches to the control of tobacco. It should be available in every medical and public health library, and many physicians would value having it in their own possession, both as a readable and interesting book, and also as an important work of reference.

The book begins with a challenging preface by Everett Koop, former US Surgeon General, and this is followed by a chapter by Sir Richard Doll describing the history of the realisation that tobacco was a harmful material, and a chapter on the major epidemiological cohort studies in the 1950s and thereafter, which established the links between tobacco use and disease. This section is full of insights and interest. The book then expands into sections on the composition of tobacco and tobacco smoke, on nicotine and addiction, and then examines the patterns of use of tobacco in different parts of the world over time, and the likely impact on world health in the future. Essays on passive smoking, adolescent smoking and smoking among women follow.

Almost half of the book consists of a series of chapters which detail the evidence for tobacco use in the causation of all those diseases known to be more common in smokers, including many forms of

malignancy, and heart and respiratory disease. It then concludes with a section on tobacco control policy, examining global attempts to control tobacco promotion and use, the role of legislation, restrictions and bans on smoking, and the treatment of tobacco dependence.

Each chapter is well referenced, and considering the number of authors and editors, it is impressive to find that all the important reference sources until and including 2002 are quoted. Over the last 40 years or so, the medical and scientific community has had to battle against the interests and arguments of the tobacco industry, and this has sometimes led to passionate discussion. The strength of this book is the solid scientific evidence and argument which is all the more impressive as a basis for effective public health measures in the future. Any consumer product which causes the premature death of half of its users (and much ill-health besides) must surely be controlled much more strictly, and in the final chapter Nigel Gray makes a strong case for the regulation of tobacco products, to reduce the risks of their use and standardise the dose of nicotine delivered. That food products are now regulated makes the lack of tobacco regulation all the more obvious.

This book is recommended reading for all the medical profession, and will be of major interest and importance to all those involved in health improvement.