

All you ever wanted to know about tobacco

Thomas C. Meyer, MD

by Thomas C. Meyer, MD, WMJ Medical Editor

June was Men's Health month. I believe it because Dr. Alt told me when we were discussing his guest editorial (p 8), but I did not see anything else about men's health amongst all the Father's Day promotions. It lends credence to Dr. Alt's view that we really ought to be taking more interest in the fact that there is a widening "life expectancy gap" between men and women (2.2 years in 1920 vs 6 years in 1998) although the overall expectation of life is increasing. Dr. Alt weaves the thread of "traditional masculinity" as one of the principal underlying factors for this increasing disparity and offers advice as to how we may make a modest personal start on trying to reverse this trend.

The rest of the issue is devoted to tobacco dependence. It is fascinating to see how many ways it is possible to study a single, albeit complex, addiction that grips almost one-quarter of the people in the United States.

Anderson and Fiore's guest editorial (p 14) urges us to regard tobacco dependence as a chronic disease and treat it as such – with patience, perseverance and compassion, as well as reassuring us that it is OK to try polypharmacy as an adjunct to management. Several papers from the energetic group in the University of Wisconsin's Department of Preventive Medicine and Comprehensive Cancer Center

provide interesting reports: Trends in Self-Reported Cigarette Smoking in Wisconsin (p 24); The Influence of Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomics (p 29); Smoking During Pregnancy - Wisconsin versus the United States (p 34); Tobacco Use Among High School Students in Madison (p 43); Progress in Reducing Per Capita Cigarette Sales in Wisconsin (p 49); Smoking Policies in Manufacturing and Assembly Workplaces (p 67); and Lung Cancer Mortality Report Card (p 70).

There is something of interest and possible puzzlement in one or more of these reports for each of us. Consider:

- the finding that there has been almost no change in the overall Wisconsin self-reported adult smoking prevalence in the last 15 years while that of 18 to 24 year olds has risen from 18% to 36% in the same period (p 24);
- there is still an inverse ratio between educational achievement and cigarette smoking (p 29);
- the rate of Wisconsin smokers during pregnancy remains higher than the rest of the country (p 34);
- smoking by students in the Madison School District has declined in the past 5 years (p 43);
- the average per capita sales of cigarettes in Wisconsin has declined less than the rest of

the country (p 49);

- Wisconsin's clean indoor air law specifically exempts manufacturing workplaces from its provisions (p 67);
- and it is interesting to see how one's own county "stacks up" against other Wisconsin counties in an exercise using lung cancer mortality as a measure of local tobacco control (p 70).

The remaining papers provide useful information on aspects of tobacco dependence which also warrant attention. Ms. McCusker reports on the alarmingly high use of tobacco among American Indian/Alaskan Native youth—especially girls—in Wisconsin (p 40). And Burns/Fiore and Carr and his colleagues urge us to refer any Medicaid smoker to the effective and inexpensive Medicaid tobacco dependence program (pp 54, 59).

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