

## LETTERS

## ALL ABOUT SMOKING CESSATION

**Fundamental re-think on smoking is needed**

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Excuse my naivety, but isn't smoking's continued legality one of the most important factors accounting for its slow rate of decline?<sup>1</sup> Any other drug causing a fraction of the morbidity and mortality of tobacco would have been outlawed long ago, putting aside alcohol for the moment.

In 2010 mephedrone became a class B drug following widespread media coverage and reports of some deaths in the preceding months,<sup>2</sup> although the evidence surrounding the dangers of mephedrone does not exist. This is in stark contrast to tobacco, which is responsible for around 100 000 deaths each year in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Why should smoking get special treatment?

For mainly economic and political reasons, adults with enough change in their pocket can walk into their local shop and buy a packet of cigarettes. They will not be judged and will not feel ashamed: smoking is an acceptable addiction. If the tabloid press were to publish a list of the names of the more than 250 people killed by smoking related disease each day, would the government be as fast to react as it did for mephedrone?

People's attitude towards drugs should be evidence based, and not informed by politics or popular opinion. How must smokers feel when they are encouraged to quit their habit by the same government that welcomes tobacco taxes so gladly? While smoking remains legal, the number of smokers is never going to fall significantly—no matter how much taxes rise, how plain cigarette packets become, or how many millions of pounds is spent on cessation.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Spence D. If and butts about smoking cessation. *BMJ* 2011;343:d6171. (27 September.)
- 2 Home Office. A change to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971: Control of mephedrone and other cathinone derivatives. Home Office circular 010/2010. April 2010. [www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/corporate-publications-strategy/home-office-circulars/circulars-2010/010-2010/](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/corporate-publications-strategy/home-office-circulars/circulars-2010/010-2010/).
- 3 Peto R, Lopez AD, Boreham J, Thun M. Mortality from smoking in developed countries 1950-2000. 2nd ed. 2006. [www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/~tobacco/](http://www.ctsu.ox.ac.uk/~tobacco/).

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