



## **NICE Consultation: Preventing the uptake of smoking by children**

This is a joint response from the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), Association of Optometrists (AOP), the College of Optometrists and the Federation of Ophthalmic & Dispensing Opticians (FODO).

Together ABDO, AOP, the College and FODO represent the 10,500 optometrists and over 5,000 dispensing opticians and optical businesses who provide high quality and accessible eye care services throughout the UK. Optometrists and opticians represent a diverse ethnic mix.

We have confined our responses to those questions that we feel are relevant to our members, the eye care providers working mainly in the community.

We support the need for mass media campaigns to prevent the uptake of smoking among young people aged under 18. The draft guidance rightly acknowledges that these advertisements need to elicit an emotional reaction such as fear. Given that sight is the one sense most people fear losing, introducing warnings on this risk will provide a strong reason to prevent children from starting smoking. Given the overwhelming evidence that smoking causes vision loss in later life, this link needs to be included in smoking prevention campaigns. Optometrists and dispensing opticians, as eye care professionals, are well placed to perform a public health role in supporting that message to a younger audience.

There is a widespread lack of awareness of the risk of severe visual loss and blindness from smoking. Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the leading cause of severe visual loss and blindness in the UK. (1) There are several factors which increase the risk of a person developing AMD of which smoking is the only modifiable one. Studies in the UK have shown that smoking more than doubles the risk of developing AMD. (2) It is estimated there are over 40,000 cases in the UK of AMD with sight loss in people aged over 70 caused as a result of smoking. (3)

Smoking is also a major risk factor for the development of cataracts. (4) In the UK cataract surgery is the most common ophthalmic surgical procedure. There are both patient and NHS costs as a result of developing cataracts. Although surgical treatment for cataracts is very successful, complications can and do occur, with sometimes devastating results. Compared with non-smokers, a smoker of 20 or more cigarettes a day is at least twice as likely to develop cataracts.(5)

The guidance also rightly includes the need for graphic images that portray the detrimental effect on health of smoking. Pictorial warnings are an important part of a public health campaign to encourage more people to give up smoking, deter people from commencing smoking and reducing the detrimental effects of smoking and

second-hand smoke. These warnings should be as large and shocking as possible for maximum effect. We believe that a graphic image depicting the link between smoking and sight loss should be accompanied by the text 'Smoking causes blindness', for maximum impact.

The warnings used on tobacco products should be updated to take account of the latest research. Given the amount of emerging research on the link between smoking and AMD as cited above, we believe this risk should be included in the warnings.

<sup>1</sup> Bunce, C, Wormald, R. Leading causes of certification for blindness and partial sight in England and Wales. BMC Public Health. 2006; 6: 58.

<sup>2</sup>Tomany, SC, et al. Risk factors for incident age-related macular degeneration. Pooled findings from 3 continents. Ophthalmology 2004; 111: 1280-7

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, R et al. Age-related macular degeneration in the United Kingdom: estimates of smoking-related vision loss. Letter. Br J Ophthalmology 20 July 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Cigarettes: What the label doesn't tell you. (Chapter 15:Smoking and the eyes.) American Council on Science and Health. New York ACSH 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, S et al. Smoking and cataract: a review of causal association. Journal of Cataract & Refractive Surgery. [J Cataract Refract Surg.](#) 2005 Dec;31(12):2395-404