

National No Smoking Day: a Milestone for Tobacco Control in Brazil

During the last 25 years, tobacco control in Brazil has been centrally supported by educational and legislative measures. The inaugural milestone of this movement was the institution of the National No Smoking Day, the first contribution of the National Congress for tobacco control in Brazil, through the Federal Law # 7,488, of June 1986.

From this moment on, August 29th has been the yearly celebration date by the Ministry of Health. In 2011, year of the 25th anniversary of the Law, it is very appropriate to introduce the subject with a special edition of the Brazilian Journal of Cancerology (Revista Brasileira de Cancerologia – RBC), exclusively devoted to tobacco control. Herein, the reader will find 11 original articles, two of which have historical content; one has an opinion; three are reviews and one is a commented review. This journal will also be translated into English and distributed at the 15th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, from March 20 to 24 2012, in Singapore.

With the Law # 7,488, the National Congress contributed to introduce in the agenda of the Brazilian State some educational actions and public debates on the serious risks of tobacco smoking, which up to the moment had been conducted almost heroically by some medical leaders. For this reason, it is worth to highlight the fact that this law was inspired by a pioneer movement, led by the Medical Society of the State of Paraná, which, on August 29th 1980, promoted the Smoking Strike, in an effort to warn the population of that state about the serious risks of tobacco smoking.

We are talking about a time when the act of smoking was strongly related to a positive lifestyle, in which tobacco smoke was imposingly seen, full of glamour, in most social environments. A period when the national media sent, to all homes in the entire country, cigarette advertisements wrapped in powerful messages and images of beauty, freedom and success. And a time when the economic pressure of great transnational tobacco companies that were installed in Brazil inhibited public discussions on this subject.

Throughout these 25 years of celebrations of the National No Smoking Day, several activities and messages such as “quit smoking running”, “sports without smoking are more radical” and “art without smoking is a show”, certainly contributed to deconstruct the collective ideal of strong associations between cigarettes and sports and/or cigarettes and the culture created in product advertisements – a strategy that so far the tobacco industry tries to maintain in order to attract young people to tobacco smoking.

When creating the Federal Law # 7,488, the National Congress gave the country an important education and communication tool, which nowadays is translated into a wide social participation in the protection of the National Policy for Tobacco Control against inappropriate interferences, which perhaps is their most important legacy for both present and future generations.

This date was also the springboard for the appearance of other important actions in the field of tobacco control, such as the institution of the World No Tobacco Day, by the World Health Assembly, in 1988; the launching, in 2007, of the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS), a survey to monitor tobacco consumption by adults, implemented in 14 countries and which, in Brazil, was named Pesquisa Especial de Tabagismo - PETab (Special Survey on Tobacco); the federal laws that established restrictions to cigarette advertisements; the inclusion of sanitary warnings on tobacco product packages; and the smoking ban in closed collective places, among others, and the negotiation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control international treaty, only to mention a few – all properly addressed in articles of this journal edition.

In the year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of this Law, we hope that the National Congress maintains, before the Brazilian society, the evolution of this unfailing compromise with both health and quality of life of the nation; and allows that, in September 2011, during the summit meeting of the United Nations (UN) on chronic non-communicable diseases (cNCDs), the Brazilian delegation can pave the way so that the 2014 World Cup be under the effect of a Federal Law that makes the country 100% free of tobacco smoke.

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