Marketing tobacco to New Zealand women: 8 ways to reflect on World No Tobacco Day

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Abstract
Background: This year’s “World No Tobacco Day” on 31 May 2010 (“World Smokefree Day” in New Zealand) focuses on how tobacco is marketed to women.1 This topic is particularly relevant given the current inquiry by the Māori Affairs Select Committee into tobacco issues2 and the very high smoking prevalence among Māori women.3 Prior to middle age, the health consequences of women smoking are more serious than those caused by male smokers. This is because of the impacts of smoking in pregnancy to the fetus (e.g., perinatal mortality, low birth weight, preterm delivery etc)4 and the effects of exposing infants and children to second-hand smoke (e.g., sudden infant death syndrome and asthma). Such impacts are experienced disproportionately by Māori. Evidence from the United States reveals tobacco companies have a long history of marketing to women and brands such as Virginia Slims, Eve, Satin, Capri, and Misty were specifically designed to appeal to women.5 Overt targeting of women led the US Surgeon General to conclude that “tobacco industry marketing is a factor influencing susceptibility to and initiation of smoking among girls”.4 Evidence that tobacco companies have systematically and successfully recruited female smokers has prompted us to investigate tobacco marketing to girls and women in New Zealand, an area that has previously been analysed only very briefly.6

Methods: We searched for relevant New Zealand literature (Medline) and survey data (e.g., the Ministry of Health website). We also analysed mentholated tobacco use data from the ITC Project survey. This is a national survey of 1376 New Zealand adult (18+ years) smokers surveyed between March 2007 and February 2008. Wave two in the subsequent 12 months involved 923 respondents. Further detail on the survey methods are available in an online Methods Report7 and in publications.8,9 In addition we re-examined a collection of discarded cigarette packs obtained for other research purposes (with the methodology detailed elsewhere 10,11). Further contextual data came from a search of tobacco products for sale via online retail websites,12 13 and hand searching imported magazines held in Wellington Central Library (May 2010). We used a variant of the “five Ps” of marketing as employed by British American Tobacco in the UK (i.e., product, price, place, promotion and packaging)14 to consider how tobacco companies’ marketing might reach New Zealand women.

Results and Discussion: In total, we identified at least eight mechanisms used to market tobacco products to New Zealand women (see Table 1). These covered four of the “five Ps” of marketing in the framework used (i.e., not particularly “place”). Given the advertising and sponsorship restrictions contained in the Smoke-free Environments Act 1990 (SFEA), persistent marketing represents “policy incoherence” that we have previously discussed.15

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