

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

E 526

Smoking & Health File *SM*

Meeting with the Minister of Health, 27th April, 1967

Present:-

The Minister
Chief Medical Officer (Sir George Godber)
Mr. J.E. Pater (Under-Secretary)
Miss B. Hirst (Assistant Secretary)
Mr. R.S. Matthews (Private Secretary)

Mr. C.H. Clements
Mr. A.W.H. Stewart-Moore
Mr. C.R.L. Matchett
Mr. G.F. Todd

After the introductions, C.H.C. said that G.F.T. would hand round and read a report. As G.F.T. handed round the attached aide-memoire, the Minister said that he had always found the tobacco industry's documentation to be first class.

G.F.T. spoke from the aide-memoire. The Minister made no comment during this but gave a wry smile when G.F.T. said that Himsworth had said that the question what should be said about the tar content of cigarettes was one for the Minister of Health. After G.F.T. had finished, the Minister said that he had no objection to the proposed press statement in the last sentence. The Minister added that the report raised a number of issues and that it was most unlikely that their consideration of them would have been completed by the time that the Review was published.

The Minister asked if we knew the actual tar and nicotine figures of different brands of cigarettes, and G.F.T. handed round copies of document E 471 in which the figures were summarised. The Minister glanced at these and said that he noted that the figures were on a per cigarette basis so that they would be affected by the size of the cigarette. He next asked if he was right in concluding that the range of nicotine content was from 1.2 to 2.9 mg. per cigarette. G.F.T. said he was, except for the very few brands mentioned in footnote 3 which had a negligible sale. The Minister asked if the manufacturers had considered advertising lower nicotine cigarettes as such. Miss Hirst said that tobaccoists were selling cigarettes made from lettuce leaves that were completely free of nicotine.

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The Minister then said, reverting to the aide-memoire, that the experts consulted had been very careful in their comments. The Chief Medical Officer said that in fact they had been completely non-committal. G.F.T. said that this was not completely accurate: as the Minister had said at the previous meeting, they thought tar reduction desirable as a matter of common sense. The Minister added "on a balance of probabilities", with which G.F.T. agreed and said that their view was that the reduction of tar was more likely to be helpful than otherwise. The C.M.O. then asked if this meant that it was being claimed that a reduction in tar might be expected to result in a reduction in the carcinogenicity of cigarette smoke. C.H.C. said that it was not being claimed that lower tar cigarettes would be safer. A.M.S.-K. added that there was no scientific evidence to justify such a claim. The Minister said that the views of the experts, in the words of the report, were that "it was more likely than not that the tar from cigarette smoke contains constituents that are in some measure significant for human bronchial cancer". The C.M.O. asked: "What about the volatiles?" and added that the manufacturers did not know to what extent a reduction in tar would be reflected in a reduction in any component in smoke because they did not know what was in the volatiles. C.H.C. said that we knew that a reduction in tar was reflected in a reduction in content on the back of the pack. The C.M.O. again asked what about the volatiles, and the Minister asked if the position was that there was no likely link at present in regard to the volatiles. C.H.C. said that there was not at this stage.

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The C.M.O. asked if lower tar cigarettes would have a lower nicotine content. C.H.C. said that they could have. The Minister asked if this meant that nicotine was not necessarily reduced with tar, and C.H.C. agreed.

nicotine

The C.M.O. referred to nicotine in relation to the smoking habit and C.H.C. said they were beginning to wonder if nicotine was habit-forming at all. The Minister remarked that he had hitherto thought that nicotine was the addictive factor. C.H.C. said that it may not be entirely nicotine. The Minister replied that if it was not nicotine, the manufacturers would have to find something else that was the basis of the habit, because smoking was habit-forming.

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The Minister then asked if what the manufacturers would like to do was to produce a cigarette which had reduced tar but the same nicotine as present cigar ttes. C.H.C. replied that we did not yet know what was the level of nicotine that people needed. The Minister said that it was within the industry's capability to reduce nicotine by half, without telling anyone, and the manufacturers could then watch the effect on sales. Of course, added the Minister, the effect might be disastrous.

The C.M.C. said that there was evidence that nicotine contributed to cardiovascular disease. C.H.C. answered that they had recently sent people to the States to look into this point but they had found no fresh evidence. The C.M.C. referred to a recent Canadian report that had been more firmly against smoking on the grounds of cardiovascular disease than the Surgeon General's Report. C.H.C. said that some people clearly should not smoke.

The Minister asked about the date of publication of Dr. Day's paper in the British Journal of Cancer and the Review, and C.H.C. replied. The Minister said that it would be very interesting to see what deductions were drawn by the non-expert. The C.M.C. interjected that the publications could not be presented as evidence that a cigarette was safe or could be made safe. C.H.C. said that he expected a barrage of questions from the press on publication of the Review. The Minister said that it was impossible to predict the press reaction but it was more probable than improbable that the Review would attract attention. C.H.C. said that if the publicity gave the Ministry any help in their campaign against smoking he would be all for it.

C.H.C. said that the time had come for the manufacturers to come to the Minister about the question of lower tar. The Minister replied that at first glance it was very difficult to say anything and he would like time to study the question. If he should be ready to talk to the manufacturers further about it before the Review had been published, he would make contact with the manufacturers. Otherwise, what he proposed to say was entirely satisfactory to him. C.H.C. asked what the manufacturers should say if they were asked: "Is it a good thing to reduce tar?" The Minister suggested that what should be said was that these studies were still being evaluated. The Minister added that ultimately this was a decision that the manufacturers would have to make. He asked

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if the manufacturers were saying that they would only reduce tar if the Minister and his advisers said it was a good thing. C.H.C. replied "Yes". The Minister said he thought the manufacturers could reduce tar on their own responsibility, and added: "You have your public duty as I have".

C.H.C. said that the Minister could be asked the direct question "Is it or is it not a good thing to reduce tar?" The Minister said that if he was asked this question he would have to give the best answer that was available on technical advice. He would have to think about this. If he were to make a statement on the available expert advice that it was a good thing to reduce tar, it would have to be made without conveying that such a cigarette was safe or even significantly safer. The Minister added that this was a difficult matter and that he fully understood Himsworth's remark. He said that a point would come at which he couldn't dodge the issue, but it had not yet been reached. The C.H.C. said that the question would have to be run to an expert group. He thought that the type of answer might be that, on general principles, it was certainly advisable to reduce tar but that there was no evidence that cigarette smoke would thereby be made safe or safer, and that it was far better not to have cigarettes smoked at all.

C.H.C. asked what the Minister would say if he was asked to acquaint the public with the tar contents of cigarette brands. The Minister said that he would not answer this second question until he had answered the first question whether lower tar cigarettes were a good thing. He said that if he gave a positive answer along the lines that the C.H.C. had suggested, then he would have to decide if the general arguments for reducing tar were sufficient to ask the industry to disclose the tar figures. He added that, thinking aloud, this might be a good thing on general grounds. On the other hand, to require the industry to declare the tar content of cigarette brands might make it a more significant thing than he had been advised that it was. His answer must therefore depend on the strength of the expert view as to the value of reducing tar. If the value was purely marginal, to ask for the tar content of individual brands might not be called for. On the other hand, if someone said it was a very good thing to reduce tar, then he might consider asking the manufacturers to consider providing the information.

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The Minister then added that the manufacturers had commercial interests and they might find it a selling point to advertise that a cigarette had lower tar. A.M.H.S.-M. said that this could not be done because it would be implying a health claim. Mr. Pater said that from their side they would have to tell the public to take no notice of this misleading information.

The C.M.O. said that supposing the Minister was advised on general principles that it was advisable that cigarettes should give rise to less tar, he would also almost certainly be advised that they should have less nicotine. However, if nicotine was what smokers looked for, then a reduction in tar that meant a reduction in nicotine might mean an increase in smoking. The C.M.O. added that no-one knew the answers to these questions.

The C.M.O. then said that he would not advise the Minister on this technical kind of information without referring the matter to an expert group appointed either ad hoc or under the Standing Medical Advisory Committee.

The Minister asked if the position of the manufacturers was that they would fend off questions until they had had the considered reaction of the Minister. When told that it was, he replied that this was a fair view.

The C.M.O. said that when the reports had been published, they could consider the question of tar and nicotine. The next meeting of the Standing Medical Advisory Committee was in July and the matter could be put before them. He was sure the Committee would want to set up a special sub-committee. Or alternatively, a group might be set up before then to study the problem. The Minister said that no-one should expect a snap statement on this subject.

C.H.S. said that if the matter came up in the meantime, the manufacturers would have to push it towards the Minister. The Minister said he accepted this. The C.M.O. said that the position implicit in the discussion was that the industry could reduce the tar and nicotine content of cigarettes but wanted first to know the Minister's views, but the advice to the Minister would go further and ask why there should be smoking at all.

The Minister then asked if his and the manufacturers' respective positions were understood. C.H.S. said "Yes" and added that the Minister had said what the manufacturers had hoped he would say.

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C.H.C. expressed the thanks of the manufacturers for the discussion, adding that the manufacturers recognised that there were certain types of people who ought not to smoke. The C.M.O. interjected that all non-smokers suffered from other people's smoking. The Minister thanked the party for discussing these matters with him.

G.F.T.

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