

Cancer centers set sights on tobacco settlement

Across America, special interest groups are lining up, hoping to get money out of the national tobacco settlement for their pet causes, many of them non-health related. Signed on November 23rd by 46 states, the settlement requires several of the major tobacco companies to pay \$206 billion over the next 25 years. Each state will receive a different amount, dependent partially on their number of Medicaid residents. And although there is nothing in the deal outlining how the funds have to be used, cancer centers in at least three states are working on garnering a share—beating out groups that would use the money for new classrooms, roads or housing.

The suits were originally filed by all 50 states to recover costs of caring for Medicaid recipients who contracted tobacco-related illnesses. Under the action, tobacco companies are required to stop billboard advertising, limit sponsorship of sporting events and mount a counter-marketing campaign aimed at children. Four states—Mississippi, Minnesota, Florida and Texas—settled separately with the industry earlier in 1998. But none of the settlements have been finalized. In every state, a Supreme Court judge has to agree to the terms before the state legislature can appropriate the money. That is where the lobbying comes in.

In Texas, the Attorney General, the Governor and the state House and Senate appropriations leaders have agreed that the lion's share of the \$15.3 billion payout should go to health-related programs, says Harry Holmes, associate vice president for government relations at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. If the legislature, which begins meeting this month, accepts this agreement, M.D. Anderson will get \$100 million over over two years beginning in 2000, to go to an endowment for research and education. Cancer centers in Florida also managed to get in some requests to their legislators, and in addition are requesting \$100 million from increased tobacco sales tax for a new cancer research tower at the Tampa-based Moffitt Cancer Center. Final decisions are expected in May.

Seven cancer centers in Pennsylvania are lobbying for a 25 percent share of the state's \$11.2 billion payout. "These funds have to be set aside in order to deal with the burden of human cancer we're going to face in the next generation," says F. Jay McKay, executive vice president of Fox Chase Can-

cer Center. The money would be spent on basic science, genetics, addiction research, and new therapies, McKay says. Each institution's share will be determined by the amount of National Cancer Institute funding it receives, a division to which all seven have agreed. "It's a fair amount of money and it will greatly strengthen the institutions in Pennsylvania," says McKay.

But some groups, including the American Lung Association, opposed the settlement. Paul Billings, ALA spokesman, says "there's less money here than people think." ALA is working to overturn the

settlement in some states where such action is still possible. In others, ALA aims to steer the funds into education and addiction prevention programs, according to Billings.

The tobacco manufacturers settled primarily to avoid the cost and hassle of fighting 50 separate suits. It is not an admission of negligence. "In a settlement, you don't normally admit guilt," says Mary Aronson, an independent tobacco industry analyst based in Washington DC. "They're viewing [the settlement] as blanket protection from future litigation." The companies still face private suits, however.

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Wellcome survey reveals public mistrust of scientists

A detailed study of public attitudes to research using cloned human embryos has revealed widespread distrust of the effectiveness of any attempt to regulate the activities of the biomedical research community.

The survey was carried out by the Medicine in Society program of Britain's Wellcome Trust. Its results were published last month, shortly before a government advisory panel recommended that scientists be allowed to do research on human embryos if the goal was to produce medical therapies such as replacement organs.

The survey found that many people were ignorant of current restrictions on cloning research and unaware of the role of the two groups that constitute the cloning panel—the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority and the Human Genetics Advisory Committee.

Even when the rules were explained to them, most of those interviewed expressed skepticism that they would have much impact. For example, it was generally felt that many scientists carried out controversial research in secret, and that those thwarted by British regulations would merely take their work abroad. Scientists were seen as always keen "to take another step," with disregard for any negative consequences, and commercial pressures were cited as likely to lead to the manipulation of research for negative ends. "For many, illegal research seemed inevitable and impossible to prevent," says the Public Attitudes to Human Cloning report.

"With the recent fiasco over BSE in cattle, it did not come as a huge surprise that people did not trust the regulators," says sociologist Suzanne King of the Wellcome Trust, who did the survey. "But we were surprised at how skeptical people were."

The survey was based on detailed interviews with 79 adults, carefully selected to provide a representative spectrum of differing points of view on human cloning. Thus, participants ranged from women who had lost young children, to lesbians who might be expected to be in favor of reproductive techniques that did not involve men.

All participants attended an initial session, either in groups or as couples, at which they were introduced to the scientific aspects of human cloning and ethical debates about its applications. A follow-up session was held several weeks later, after the individuals had had time to reflect on the information.

According to King, one of the strongest results to emerge was an across-the-board antipathy to the idea of cloning adult humans. "This seems to contradict the suggestion by some that attitudes towards cloning will differ between different social groups, depending on their relationship to the issue," she says.

King admits that the relatively small sample size means that the results have limitations; however she argues that the survey reveals that the problem of creating public confidence in the regulation of controversial research is even bigger than many realize. A copy of the report is available at <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/wellcomegraphic/a2/c6index.html>

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