The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

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For as long as I have been involved in the treatment of cancer, there has never been a 'treater' who preferred treatment over prevention. Despite concerns over exposure to chemicals, increased obesity and other carcinogenic risks, the big concern is, and always has been, tobacco. In 2004, tobacco use was responsible for 5 million deaths worldwide, and it is estimated that, unless we do more to prevent its use, the yearly total of deaths from tobacco will have risen to 10 million by 2020. In the US alone about 450,000 people die each year from the effects of smoking.

On 30 November 2004 an event occurred that, given its importance to the anti-tobacco movement, received surprisingly little attention. On that day, Peru became the 40th country to ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCTC was adopted, after 4 years of negotiation, by a voice vote of the 192 members of the World Health Assembly.

The FCTC was sponsored by the WHO in 2003 and is the world's first public health treaty committed to stemming the globalization of the tobacco epidemic. For the FCTC to become legally binding, it had to be ratified by the legislative bodies of 40 nations, hence the importance of the ratification by the Peruvian government. The FCTC became legally binding for all ratifying parties on 28 February 2005.

The FCTC's mandatory provisions include a comprehensive ban on advertising, sponsorship and promotion, with narrow exceptions for countries such as the US, which face constitutional conflicts. It also stipulates warning labels on tobacco products that cover at least 30% of the package, and elimination of deceptive and misleading labels such as 'light' and 'low tar'. In addition, it provides for protection

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of non-smokers in public places and places of work, and contains specific measures to reduce tobacco smuggling.

The treaty encourages parties to enact other tobacco control policies, such as increasing tobacco taxes, eliminating duty-free sales of tobacco products, prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors and including tobacco cessation services in national health plans. In 2005, the ratifying member nations will begin negotiations to develop more detailed provisions of the treaty.

While the US was the 108th member nation to sign the FCTC, it has not yet ratified the treaty. Ratification requires that the President send the treaty to the US Senate and that the Senate vote in favor of it by a two to three majority.

In the past four decades, the US has often led the way in the battle against the use of tobacco, and, indeed, the American Cancer Society played an important role in developing the framework agreement. Unlike most of the world, many of the provisions of the treaty are already in effect throughout the US, but a worldwide treaty offers the chance to globalize the anti-tobacco effort in a way never before possible. For the US to continue its leadership, the treaty must be ratified by the Senate. The US tobacco industry, will, of course, mightily oppose the effort. The President, and Senate Majority leader Bill Frist, who, in his prior life as a Cardiac surgeon, dealt with the ravages of tobacco on a daily basis, can leave a legacy of health for the US and the world by supporting ratification of the FCTC.

Supplementary information about the FCTC is available on the *Nature Clinical Practice Oncology* website.

VT DeVita, Jr is the Editor-in-Chief of Nature Clinical Practice Oncology.

Competing interests

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