

Press Release

Hundreds of Health Professionals urged the Prime Minister to enforce his decision of raising size of pictorial warning on cigarette packs to save children

ISLAMABAD-April, 19, 2017. Last week more than 150 public health professionals added to the voice of more than 150 other health professionals who approached the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with the plea to enforce health ministry's two years old decision of raising graphic health warning on cigarette packs to 85%.

The total number of public health professionals including doctors, oncologists, pediatricians, cardio physicians, pulmonologists, neurologists, dentists etc who have approached the PM, holding charge of the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSRC), has reached to over 300.

Those who sent petition to the PM for raising GHW include various health and research facilities across Pakistan such as the National Alliance for Tobacco Control, Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital and Research Centre and other renowned medical institutes and hospitals, King Edward Medical University, Lahore; Punjab Institute of Cardiology, Lahore; Jinnah Hospital, Lahore; Gulab Devi Postgraduate Medical Institute, Lahore; Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore; Sheikh Zayed Medical College and Hospital, Rahimyar Khan; Ojha Institute of Chest Disease, Karachi; Ayub Medical and Dental College, Abbottabad; Women Medical College, Abbottabad; Health Services Academy, Islamabad; Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Islamabad; Shifa International Hospital, Islamabad; Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre, Karachi; National Institute of Child Health, Karachi; Liaquat National Hospital, Karachi; Aga Khan University, Karachi; Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Karachi; Korangi Medical Centre, TB Control Programme (Sindh), Karachi Medical and Dental College, OMI Hospital, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi; and the Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar.

The decision to raise the size of GHW on cigarette packs was announced by the Minister of State for NHSRC Ms. Saira Afzal Tarar on February 11, 2015 but to date it is not enforced and the size of GHW remains to 40%.

Nadeem Iqbal, CEO of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection, a health rights origination that is spearheading the campaign for higher GHW said that Ms Tarar's decision was the single most initiative that was hailed by national and international health community as it can make a large number of smokers to quit and substantial number of children to not to initiate smoking.

Quoting from government statistics, Nadeem said that 73% of smokers between 15-24 of age have been noticing health warnings and 33% of them are thinking of quitting because of GHW. The number of these people will increase if size of GHW is increased to 85%.

“International studies corroborate that tobacco package provides a educational opportunity to educate smokers on the hazards of tobacco. A smokers who smokes at least a pack daily is exposed to images printed on packs at least 20 times a day (7,000 times a year). It means that

enhanced GHW provides 20 opportunities a day to the health ministry to deliver anti-smoking messages at critical junctures - at the point of purchase and the time of smoking. The use of pictorial images enhances the impact of the public health message,” said Nadeem.

Supporting the cause Dr. Tabish Hazir, a renowned pediatrician said that raising GHW is the most cost effective intervention by the health ministry to neutralize the impact of tobacco products and reduce the influence of the tobacco industry.

“If you smoke while you are pregnant; your baby could be born too early, have a birth defect, or die from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Even being around cigarette smoke (SHM) can cause several health problems for children,” argued Dr Tabish.

Dr. Hassan Imtiaz, neurologist from PIMS, Islamabad, while articulating the perilous outcome of smoking said: “This is the leading predisposing factor to atherosclerotic diseases like stroke, coronary artery disease, carotid stenosis and several malignancies. There is a dangerously increasing trend of smoking in our youth which can predict a massive surge in the burden of diseases caused by smoking in future. This is a challenge for our society to tackle this major havoc to health of our young generation and this can only be done with proper planning and awareness of communities in the right direction. Raising Graphical Health Warning is certainly one of the most cost effective way to let people know, whether they be literate or illiterate about the hazards of smoking.”

“The youth today is born in an era that is digital to its core. They learn everything by seeing. Being a dentist I treat young people on daily basis and counsel them to quit smoking. Yet the rate of mouth ulcers and gingivitis is at higher rate and honestly speaking no one else but only a smoker can withstand bad breath of a chain smoker. I am a consistent supporter of this cause and vehemently appeal to the PM,” Dr Sadia Ausim, Dentist, while signing the petition.

In Pakistan nearly 110,000 deaths are attributed each year to diseases caused by tobacco. Around 1,200 children initiate smoking daily and with every passing day the burden of tobacco epidemic is escalating. The incidence of lung and oral cancers are also on rise. The healthcare cost incurred due to cancers and other tobacco related diseases is manifold and exceeds revenues generated from tobacco industry.

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