

Addiction researcher optimistic about new, highly visual labels that show ill effects of smoking

June 27 2011

By presenting the concrete reality of what will happen as a result of smoking, the new anti-smoking warnings that will show up on packs of cigarettes next year have a good chance of discouraging smoking, said Warren Bickel, professor at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute.

The nine new warnings designed by the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) include a photo of rotting teeth and injured lips, a photo of damaged lungs, a photo of a man exhaling smoke through a tracheostomy hole in his throat, and a photo of the corpse of a smoker.

"The FDA's images telescope the future to now. The images bring future consequences into the moment the smoker is making the choice to buy a pack or open a pack of [cigarettes](#)," said Bickel, who directs the Advanced Recovery Research Center, which is doing neurocognitive training to get [smokers](#) to place greater value on the future.

He referred to the marketing strategy for many products of offering immediate pleasure. "The FDA is using anti-marketing."

Behavioral researchers who study [addiction](#) have documented that addicts do not value the future – as a result, do not acknowledge long-term consequences of their actions. Bickel points out that James Gross, professor of psychology at Stanford, has shown that when the choice

between an immediate reward and a future reward is explicit, such as receiving \$1,000 in a year and nothing now, "people value the later reward a little more."

Bickel has used a combination of behavior research and functional MRI to identify the area of the brain that is dysfunctional in addicts when it comes to thinking about and planning for the future. Subsequent research by Bickel has demonstrated that memory training can improve function in this area and he is working with smokers to exercise and train the aspects of the prefrontal cortexes involved.

Bickel is also professor of psychology in the College of Science at Virginia Tech.

Provided by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Citation: Addiction researcher optimistic about new, highly visual labels that show ill effects of smoking (2011, June 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

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