

Surgeon general still has important role to play

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(HealthDay)—The Surgeon General has an important role in educating and mobilizing the public and shaping policy on public health issues, according to an ideas and opinions piece published online Dec. 30 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

Former [surgeon general](#) David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., from the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, discusses the [credibility](#) and influence of the Surgeon General in response to changes in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS).

Satcher notes that the responsibility of the Surgeon General was initially to head the PHS, and changed when the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was established in 1954 and given authority over the PHS. Four lessons emerge from the Office of the Surgeon General's

approach to smoking and other [public health](#) issues. Firstly the Surgeon General's credibility is an important factor in the acceptance and impact of their positions. Secondly, the Surgeon General's reports must educate, motivate, and mobilize the public to take action. Thirdly, these reports must be based on current evidence. Finally, effective reports frequently lead to policy change. In the case of smoking, these policies, motivated by the reports, have had a great impact.

"The Surgeon General's responsibility is to provide the American people with the best available scientific information and motivate them to secure and maintain their health," Satcher writes. "To do this, he or she must have credibility in the eyes of the American public, clinicians, and the PHS."

More information: [Full Text \(subscription or payment may be required\)](#)

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