

PHARMACISTS REVOLT AGAINST TOBACCO



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It was an issue that pharmacist Adrian Thomas had wrestled with for years, the ethics of dispensing lifesaving prescriptions in the back of the store and in the front of the store selling a product that often kills. Cigarettes.

Thomas was not alone with this dilemma, but he was unaware of the national debate as to whether pharmacies should sell cigarettes. He was not aware of the number of independent pharmacists who had come to the same conclusion, that they could not wear two hats, that of the health care professional at one end of the store and cigarette salesman at the other.

In late February, Thomas made the decision to discontinue selling tobacco products.

He first burned his license and then made a bonfire of about \$2000 worth of cigarettes, pipes, lighters, and other smoking-related products.

Thomas credits his pharmacological classmate, Ernie Dostalík, with helping him make the decision. Dostalík had quit selling cigarettes at this two stores in the greater Pittsburgh area several years ago and had harped at Thomas to do the same.

Dostalík had advised him to alert the media and the American Cancer Society so he could make a statement, a statement that essentially proclaims that pharmacists

are health care professionals first and businessmen second. Thomas followed that advice but on a local level.

Thomas and Dostalík were not alone. The Pennsylvania Medical Society recently honored 62 pharmacists for their tobacco-free stores.

But Thomas, for some reason, has been overwhelmed by the national media: All of the networks called, and he was interviewed on radio stations from Alaska to Miami. He has received checks from individuals to make up for the inventory he destroyed. He donated the checks to the American Cancer Society.

Maybe the media blitz was just a result of timing, as America becomes more and more Tobacco-free. It has become socially unacceptable to light up in many situations, from private homes to sections of restaurants, and tobacco use is illegal now on most forms of public transportation. More hospitals have become tobacco-free, and more businesses are banning tobacco use in the workplace.

Though overwhelmed by the media attention, he was more pleased with the letters he received from smokers.

"These were the ones who said, "I just read what you did and if you can do that, I can quit smoking. I've just had my last cigarette," Thomas said.