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**'Exposing Deceit and Wrongdoing in the US Tobacco Industry: lessons learned for health improvement'**

Jeffrey Wigand PhD, Smoke Free Kids, Inc

Overview:

Jeffrey Wigand was head hunted to join a major tobacco company. In the hope of rising to the challenge of creating a safer cigarette, securing career advancement and bringing his children (one of whom required expensive continuous medical treatment) closer to their maternal grandparents, he joined in January 1989.

Working as a senior Research and Development Executive, he became increasingly uncomfortable about the company's attitudes and actions towards the health impact of its products and product contents. After a series of incidents, he was finally sacked in March 1993, later going public on his concerns. Among other activities he is now promoting the adoption of a self extinguishing cigarette as a safety development and as another way of de-normalising tobacco in everyday life.

Key ideas:

- Nicotine Delivery System: a term used by Tobacco Company executives to describe the main purpose of cigarettes.
- Reduced Ignition Propensity Cigarette: a cigarette, constructed to self extinguish when left unattended.
- Moral Imperative: Describes a situation when one is driven by one's conscience, values and sense of right and wrong to take a course of action. Examples might include "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" and "first of all do no harm". Dr Wigand related this to John Stuart Mills' idea that the sole purpose of law should be to prevent harm to others. He used the term to help describe the turning point in his thinking about his involvement in the tobacco industry, when the burden of his experience made it impossible not to act and retain integrity.

Summary:

Dr Wigand began his lecture by telling us about the initial detailed conversations he had with senior executives who were trying to persuade him to join the company. He suggested that, among other issues, they repeatedly discussed and concurred with the idea that their business was that of an effective "nicotine delivery system" and that they understood that nicotine is an addictive substance. In hiring Dr Wigand they hoped to develop cigarette production more scientifically by altering the tar/nicotine ratio in cigarettes taking out tar and other substances which they understood to be damaging to health, while leaving nicotine, which consumers wanted, in.

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He went on to explain firstly that much of the manufacturing process and many of the 608 additives in cigarettes are designed to make nicotine delivery more effective. So for example, glycerol which makes up 7-8% of the tobacco volume of a cigarette, along with compounds found in chocolate and liquorice, are added to sweeten the smoke. Ammonia is added to free the nicotine by encouraging its transformation from a solid to a gas. In addition aspects of the construction of cigarettes mean that nicotine delivery in use is greater than that tested in the laboratory.

He also suggested that it is essential for a company (whose products when used as intended kill people) to recruit new consumers among the young and to this end tobacco products are made sweeter. In addition, as markets shrink in developed countries, it is becoming more important to tobacco concerns to grow the market in developing countries, where the potential markets are huge and the cultural context more favourable. To combat this he suggested that at least three actions were known to reduce smoking among the young:

- increasing the legal age at which it is permissible to smoke;
- graphic representation of smoking damage on cigarette packets; and
- increasing price (a 10% increase in price reduces the proportion of young people smoking by 7% and established smokers by 4%).

His concerns began to develop rapidly. Within three months it was clear to him that scientific reports were being interpreted by lawyers before being released to the public realm, in order to protect the company from accusations of liability in relation their products. This included, for example, statements which denied the addictive nature of tobacco and the health damaging effects of the constituents of tobacco smoke, in direct contradiction to the conversations with senior executives in the run up to joining the company. He was being asked in effect to tell two stories, one inside the company and the other outside.

He then described the Airbus project to develop a new smoking product, similar to cigarettes but safer due to its lower combustion temperature, which kept some of the more dangerous chemical transformations from occurring. Toxicology tests on the product were promising and a group of 365 tobacco industry scientists met in conference to discuss how to work together on improvement. The final report from the conference had as a starting point that tar kills and nicotine is addictive. Dr Wigand was admonished by his company and its legal department rewrote the report with these references removed. The company became nervous about the fact that producing a safer cigarette implied that their current products were unsafe and moved the project overseas, where its documentation would be unavailable to the legal system in the USA.

A further incident occurred some two and a half years later when he discovered that one of his staff had smuggled tobacco seeds into Brazil. He was again summoned to the chief executive's office and told not to concern himself with this matter as the lawyers had taken care of it.

Finally, he found out that a known carcinogen, coumerin, though it had been removed from cigarette tobacco, was still used in one of the company's pipe tobaccos. Wigand asked that it be removed and wrote a four page memo to this effect and sent it to the CEO and was subsequently dismissed on the grounds of poor communication skills.

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Some time after his dismissal he was hired by CBS, the broadcasting company to provide scientific advice on a dossier which had been sent to them about the Hamlet project. In working on this he became angry, since he discovered that tobacco companies had known for some considerable time that low temperature cigarette combustion would make cigarettes less hazardous but had not acted upon this knowledge. This ultimately led to Dr Wigand's public pronouncements about his experience of working in the tobacco industry and the release of the film 'The Insider' in 1999.

Among the many activities which Dr Wigand is engaged in is that of promoting a self extinguishing cigarette (Reduced Ignition Propensity cigarette). This cigarette has been adopted in Canada and several US states in the hope that those who continue to smoke are less likely to start a fire from an unattended cigarette.

You can learn more about Jeffrey Wigand and his work at his website:
<http://www.jeffreywigand.com/insider/index.php>.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

Summary prepared by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health.