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## Lingering industry influence on tobacco regulations

Tobacco industry representatives attempted to influence a committee whose 2001 report continues to affect tobacco regulations in the United States to this day, according to an analysis of documents released through litigation.

In 1999, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) appointed 12 experts to a committee to assess the scientific basis for tobacco harm reduction, at the request of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The result was an influential 2001 report, *Clearing the Smoke: Assessing the Science Base for Tobacco Harm and Reduction*. But the report inadequately reflects public health risks, particularly with respect to products marketed as less dangerous, say the authors of a recent research paper ([www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001450](http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1001450)).

“The report contributes to the fundamental misbelief that less harmful types of cigarettes could decrease tobacco-related disease in the population,” Dr. Thomas Kyriss, coauthor of the paper, wrote in an email.

The researchers examined previously secret documents showing that tobacco company representatives pushed for the sale of conventional cigarettes without FDA approval and delivered presentations to the committee that understated the public health harms of low-yield cigarettes while highlighting industry-sponsored research. They also criticized committee members for their limited expertise and suggested alternative members who were affiliated with the industry.

Tobacco companies “were successful in getting their views reflected in the IOM report, which has had lasting impact,” Stanton Glantz, another coauthor of the paper, wrote in an email. “The lesson for today is that ‘scientific’ submissions from the industry cannot be taken at face value and should not be relied on.”

Some major tobacco companies appear mute on the issue. Philip Morris USA and Imperial Tobacco Canada—British American Tobacco Group did not respond to CMAJ interview requests. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company declined to comment.

IOM media representative Jennifer Walsh, reached by email, responded with a “no comment,” but did point out that even the editor’s summary of the research paper concluded that “these findings provide no evidence that the efforts of tobacco companies influenced the Institute of Medicine committee.”

The authors of the paper acknowledge that their findings don’t prove there was actual bias but say the composition and conclusions of the committee still raise serious concerns.

“I can imagine that the intentions of some of the committee members were honest. But the intentions of some other members, who had close ties to the tobacco industry, as we were able to prove in our study, should be considered with caution,” Kyriss wrote in an email. “In my opinion any form of smoking endangers health. Therefore the conclusion of the committee that harm reduction should be feasible is nonsense.” — Asfandyar Khan Niazi, Islamabad, Pakistan

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