



Between January 1994 and October 1996, physicians new to practice in Manitoba were issued "provisional" billing numbers. However, all such numbers have now been converted to "valid and active" status. As a result, there are now no financial or geographic barriers to fee-for-service practice in Manitoba.

John A. Laplume, LLB
Executive Director
Manitoba Medical Association
Winnipeg, Man.
Received via e-mail

Japan's smoking epidemic

I read with interest the editorial "Taxes and the tobacco wars" (*Can Med Assoc J* 1997;156:205-6), by Dr. Lawrence W. Green. A tobacco tax is a well-known means of preventing smoking and decreasing cigarette use

among teenagers. In Japan, cigarettes are cheaper than in Canada. A pack of Mild Sevens, the best-selling brand, costs 220 yen, or about Can\$2.40.

The increase in the number of underage smokers and young women smoking is one of Japan's most important problems.¹ According to the Japan Tobacco Association, 334.7 billion cigarettes were sold in 1995.² The prevalence of smoking in 1995 was 58.8% among men and 15.2% among women — in other words, about 27.3 million men and 7.5 million women smoke.³ Because of the growing popularity of foreign cigarettes, particularly US brands, thanks to advertising and vending machines, the share of the cigarette market held by Japan Tobacco Inc. has dropped from 98.5% in 1982 to 78.8% in 1995.

On Apr. 1, 1997, the consumption

tax applied to cigarettes will be raised from 3% to 5%. The newspapers say that Japan Tobacco Inc. will mark up 23 of its 118 cigarette brands by 10 yen per pack, upping the price of a pack of Mild Sevens to 230 yen.

If it wants to indicate that it takes this threat to people's health seriously, the Japanese government should increase taxation by 10 yen per cigarette, not per package.

Hiroshi Kawane, MD
Kawasaki Medical School
Kurashiki City
Okayama, Japan

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3. Kawane H. Tobacco advertising: cigarette advertisements are still allowed on television in Japan [letter]. *BMJ* 1996;312:705.

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