

## Graphic tobacco warnings having desired effect

Those graphic, even grisly, warnings on Canadian cigarette packages appear to be having the desired effect, data from a Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) survey indicate. Among smokers surveyed, 43% said the warnings raised their concern about the health effects of smoking and 44% said they are now more motivated to quit.

The results arrived just as tobacco companies prepared to go to the Quebec Superior Court to challenge the Tobacco Act, Bill C-71. They're hoping to use the courts to eliminate the graphic warnings, advertising restrictions and related measures.

Since January 2001, tobacco companies have had to use 1 of 16 health warnings on the top half of each package. The warnings depict lung tumours, rotted teeth, brain damage, male impotence and other subjects.

The survey report, *Evaluation of New Warnings on Cigarette Packages*, presents the results of a fall 2001 survey of more than 2000 adults across Canada, of whom 633 were smokers. Among the smokers, 570 (90%) say they had noticed the new warnings.



### Scary enough?

The results pleased both the society and Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada. "They exceeded our expectations," says Executive Director Cynthia Callard.

In March Imperial Tobacco Canada Ltd. said the warnings hadn't affected sales. Spokesperson Yves Thomas Dorval pointed out that the rate of decline in sales has remained constant for the past 40 years, including the past year. (On Apr. 30, Statistics Canada's announced that cigarette sales had dropped by 5.2%

in the first quarter, the biggest decline in a decade.) The tobacco companies are attempting to remove the warnings and overturn advertising restrictions because they say these measures exceed guidelines established in 1995.

The "draconian measures prohibit our communicating to our consumers," complains John MacDonald of Rothmans, Benson & Hedges. However, the Cancer Society says the legislation falls well within the Supreme Court guidelines. — *Debra Martens, Ottawa*

## Suicide claiming more British Falkland veterans than fighting did

Military veterans who say they were not adequately treated for post-traumatic stress disorder have filed suit against the British Ministry of Defence. The case involves more than 250 former combatants who were involved in the Falklands war, policing Northern Ireland, the civil war in Bosnia, the Gulf war and other conflicts. Another 1600 veterans are considering similar action.

The High Court proceedings, which began Mar. 4 and are expected to last 5 months, focus on the experiences of 15 veterans. Lawyer Stephen Irwin accuses the ministry not only of failing to provide treatment but also of not properly preparing the soldiers for combat. He also says the ministry suffers from a "macho culture" regarding psychiatric illness.

One case cited involves a young sea-

man who has been haunted by the smell of burning flesh since he watched his best friend burn to death on a ship during the 1982 Falklands war with Argentina. According to the South Atlantic Medal Association, which represents these soldiers, 256 British soldiers were killed during that conflict, and since then 264 veterans have committed suicide.

Suicide rates among British veterans of the Gulf War are also high, according to Larry Cammock of the Gulf Veterans Association, with 93 of these deaths occurring in the decade since the conflict ended. Cammock said many veterans have had a hard time obtaining adequate psychiatric care once they leave military service and that civilian health care professionals have trouble comprehending combat conditions.

One of the witnesses, Major-General Robin Short, planned the country's medical deployment during the Gulf war in 1991. He says he tried to raise the issue of post-traumatic stress to his superiors, but received no support. British soldiers currently serving in Afghanistan will likely experience similar effects, he adds.

The defence ministry refused to comment on the case, and war veterans involved in the suit have been told not to make public statements. However, a ministry spokesman told the BBC that it recognized that some personnel have suffered because of traumatic experiences. He said that the department has a duty to ensure that such veterans received proper treatment, and if they do not they "may be entitled to compensation." — *Mary Helen Spooner, West Sussex, UK*