

“I’d like to thank the Hackademy ...”

As if winning Best Picture at the Academy Awards weren’t enough, the musical *Chicago* also captured the best smoke-filled picture award at this year’s Hackademy Awards, where it received the Thumbs Down.

The movie, which won because of its “multitudinous scenes of gratuitous tobacco use,” even featured Catherine Zeta-Jones smoking while dancing. *Gangs of New York* came a close second, but lost because it was rated R. *Chicago*, a PG-13 movie, was considered to have influence over a greater range of teens.



It was hard to miss the tobacco smoke in *Chicago*

The Hackademy Awards, launched in 1996 by the American Lung Association chapter in Sacramento, employs area teens to rate movies for smoking content. Movies in which the characters do not smoke get the Thumbs Up, while smoke fests such as *Chicago* earn the Thumbs Down. Ironically, the movie was filmed in Toronto, which bans smoking in clubs and restaurants.

Neil Collishaw, research director at Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada, said teens are influenced by the smoking they see in movies. In 1998, all major US tobacco companies signed an agreement that barred them from marketing to young people in any medium or form of entertainment, including movies. Although this made it illegal for tobacco companies to pay for product placement in movies, cigarettes still play a supporting role in many movies. The producers of *Men In Black 2* say the cigarette brands that made an appearance in that movie received the exposure for free.

Collishaw’s favourite example of tobacco revisionism involved the movie

Superman II, in which Lois Lane was portrayed as a chain smoker of Marlboro cigarettes. In the comic book that inspired the movie, Lane never smoked. — *Natalie Dunleavy, Ottawa*

Tobacco use targeted by international treaty

Some nongovernmental organizations say the final text of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control has been “watered down,” but Physicians for a Smoke-Free Canada (PSFC) contends that it will still “change the world” (see page 1263).

“There isn’t a single country that won’t have to change their laws after signing,” says PSFC Executive Director Cynthia Callard. Canada, for example, will have to tighten advertising restrictions and do more to promote smoke-free public places and to prevent smuggling.

The World Health Professions Alliance said the text is “watered down” and called for a total ban on advertising.

“What’s the use of a perfect treaty if no one signs it?” responds Callard. “This is a step forward. After we get people in the club, then we can raise the standards.”



Mixing smoking with sports: ad targets Jamaicans

Nearly 4 years in the making, the draft treaty was signed by 171 of the World Health Organization’s 192 member countries Mar. 1. It obliges them to ensure that warnings cover at least 30% of package surfaces, and prohibits misleading language “that gives the false impression that the product is less harmful than others.”

WHO says there are 1.2 billion smokers, and 75% live in developing countries. — *Barbara Sibbald, CMAJ*

Health care big issue as Quebecers choose Charest

Results from the Apr. 15 provincial election indicate that Jean Charest and his Liberals struck a chord with their promise to renew Quebec’s health care system. The Action Démocratique du Québec (ADQ) had tried to set itself apart in the 33-day campaign by stressing a larger role for private clinics. If ERs are overcrowded, said ADQ leader Mario Dumont, private clinics’ hours should be extended so care is available around the clock.

The Parti Québécois said it would continue to stress the development of group practices, which leader Bernard Landry said would help address the fact that about 30% of Quebecers do not have a family physician. In the end Charest’s health and social service platform — spelled out in a 150-page book — won out over Dumont’s support for privatization and Landry’s promise of more of the same.

Medical leaders in Quebec say the campaign itself was relatively lacklustre because issues such as the war in Iraq and SARS diverted voter attention.

Dr. Stéphane Ahern, president of the Fédération des médecins résidents du Québec, says Charest will have to take a multipronged approach to health care.

“Right now, operating rooms are frequently closed,” said Ahern, a third-year resident in internal medicine. “If you are a resident in surgery, you don’t have enough exposure to surgical practice. You then can’t acquire good skills, and you won’t feel confident about going to work on your own in a remote area where you would be expected to take a leadership role.”

Quebec Medical Association President Stanley Vollant said Charest faces a formidable challenge. “There is no magic elixir,” he said. “It is a question of working through solutions together, and Quebec’s doctors will be ready to work to ensure that the right decisions are made.” — *Louise Gagnon, Ottawa; Steve Wharry, CMAJ*