

AMA pushes for ban on tobacco items from stores with clinics

By ANTOINETTE ALEXANDER

CHICAGO — The American Medical Association is at it again.

Just days removed from public comments filed by the Federal Trade Commission decrying the rationale of such a move, physicians who gathered here last month for the AMA's annual meeting, muddied the waters, backing a new public health policy that calls for a ban on the sale of tobacco products in retail outlets housing store-based health clinics.

AMA members voted to adopt the policy June 17. "It's ridiculous for stores that house health clinics to sell tobacco products," said AMA board member Dr. William Dolan.

The move may fan the flames in several states, such as Illinois, where some lawmakers seek to impose restrictions on the operation of retail-based clinics.

One year ago, a handful of smaller physicians' organizations pushed a similarly unfriendly, anti-clinic agenda at the AMA's 2007 annual meeting, pushing for a government investigation of retail clinics.

The news of the AMA's new policy position sent waves throughout the convenient care industry.

"We do not understand how forcing retailers to choose between having an in-store clinic and selling tobacco products serves the broader goal of providing consumers with easier access to high-quality, affordable health care. The FTC was clear in its recent opinion



... about the importance of creating an open and competitive healthcare marketplace. Their opinion further reinforced anti-competitive regulations—like those that the AMA is suggesting—that would not, in fact, be in the public interest," said Tine Hansen-Turton, executive director of the Convenient Care Association. Hansen-Turton told *Drug Store News* the CCA remains committed to working with the AMA and

other groups to educate the medical community and lawmakers on the important role retail clinics play in creating access to health care.

Responding to the AMA's new health policy, Walgreens, which owns Take Care Health Systems, noted in a statement, "Access to health care is limited when regulations focus on products sold by the retailer. Take Care Health Providers can be an effective resource for those trying to quit smoking by offering information on smoking-cessation programs and healthy lifestyles, and referring them to products available at the store."

As previously reported by *Drug Store News*, the FTC approved in early June staff comments regarding proposed regulation of retail healthcare facilities in Illinois. Among the concerns is the bill's (HB 5372) prohibition on the location of a clinic "in any store or place that provides alcohol or tobacco products for sale to the public."

FTC staff argued the rationale for not allowing a clinic in a retail store that also sells tobacco or alcohol is unclear. Such a restriction could limit the supply of retail clinics and the basic medical services they would provide.

IN THE NEWS

PHILADELPHIA — The Convenient Care Association has partnered with Aon Risk Services and Nurses Service Organization, divisions within Aon Corp., to offer clinic providers liability insurance.

For start-up and smaller organizations, NSO has developed a proprietary pricing program for professional liability coverage exclusively for CCA members. For larger organizations, ARS will deploy its convenient care centers brokerage practice to address the liability needs and exposures faced by more established CCA members.

MADISON, Wis. — Meriter has teamed up with ShopKo to open two FastCare clinics here in mid-October. Meriter's clinics will be staffed by nurse practitioners.

Green Bay, Wis.-based Bellin Hospital, in partnership with ShopKo, started the FastCare concept last year. Since then, they have negotiated partnerships with other healthcare systems, including ThedaCare in Appleton, Wis., Aspirus in Wausau, Wis., and Olmstead in Rochester, Minn. Other clinics underway include one in Beaver Dam and one in Waukesha Wis.

CONSHOHOCKEN, Pa. — Take Care Health Systems has expanded its presence with store openings in Wisconsin, Colorado and Columbus.

The clinic operator has expanded into three more Wisconsin cities with the opening of its first clinics at Walgreens stores in the Green Bay, Madison and Oshkosh/Fox Valley markets. With these openings, Take Care Health Systems now has 13 clinics in the state, including 10 in the Milwaukee area, and up to six more are planned this year.

In Colorado, Take Care is looking to operate up to 16 clinics by the end of 2008.

It currently has three in Denver and plans to add locations there, as well as in the Boulder-Longmont and Colorado Springs areas.

In Columbus, Take Care has added two clinics, and now has 15 clinics in Ohio, including six in the Cincinnati area and seven in the Cleveland area.

SF mayor to drug stores: 'The butt stops here'

By ALARIC DEARMENT

SAN FRANCISCO — While many smokers regard the drug store as a destination for cigarette purchases, residents of one of California's largest cities might soon need to look elsewhere to feed their nic-fix.

Mayor Gavin Newsom proposed an amendment to the city's health code in April that would ban tobacco sales at pharmacies and drug stores, but not grocery or big-box stores with pharmacies.

Similar bans are under consideration in New Hampshire, Illinois, Tennessee and New York.

Of course, drug store chains strongly oppose San Francisco's proposed ban.

"We question the fairness of prohibiting a drug store with a pharmacy from selling tobacco products, while a grocery store or a big-box store with a phar-

macy would not be prohibited from selling tobacco products," said Cheryl Slavinsky, director of public relations for Rite Aid Stores.

Supporters of the ban, however, distinguish drug stores from other retailers because of their role as part of the healthcare industry. The San Francisco proposal states that by selling tobacco products, pharmacies "convey tacit approval" of tobacco use and send mixed messages to consumers.

Prescription for Change, a project of the California Medical Association Foundation to persuade pharmacies to stop selling tobacco, doesn't mince words: "In this singular act of hypocrisy, pharmacies are legitimizing tobacco use to our kids."

According to its Web site, more than 900 pharmacies in California no longer sell tobacco, though it did not specify whether they had stopped

because of outside pressure, and representatives from the group could not be reached for comment.

Two East Coast supermarket chains, Wegmans Food Markets and DeCicco Family Markets, also have stopped selling tobacco. Wegmans spokeswoman Jo Natale said the chain's decision, along with encouraging employees to quit smoking was out of concern for health rather than public pressure.

West Coast drug store chain Longs Drug sells cigarettes, but it also emphasizes smoking cessation.

"One might conclude that a drug store might, in fact, be a better environment for someone to look for tobacco products because of the focus on cessation products," Longs spokesman Mark Holz said.

According to Nielsen, tobacco and accessories sales at drug stores were almost \$2.66 billion in 2007.

Newsom's proposal went to a board of supervisors committee June 5. As of press time, the committee had yet to schedule it for a vote.