

Questions Over Long-Term Effects of Botox

by Helen Tunnah

The long-term effects of glamour drug Botox on the brain and nervous system are not known, the British Medical Journal has warned.

"Just because it's fashionable, people shouldn't lose sight of the fact that it's a medical treatment, not a lipstick," wrote Dr. Peter Misra, a leading London neurophysiologist, in the journal. Despite its widespread use, Botox, a derivative of the potentially deadly botulinum toxin, should be treated with care, he added.

The use of Botox as a treatment for wrinkles has skyrocketed in recent years, especially among the rich and famous who think it makes them look young. Celebrities who have used it include the Peter Pan of Pop, Cliff Richard, and Lulu. Cher, Madonna and Sylvester Stallone were also rumoured to have flirted with Botox as an alternative to the plastic surgeon's knife.

Some people might be using Botox when what they really need is psychiatric help to overcome phobias about their appearance, the doctor warned. Moreover, the long-term effects of the treatment on one's health are still not known, he stressed.

On the other hand, Dr. John Barrett of the Palm Clinic in Auckland has admitted to using Botox for many years. He was confident this was safe, he added.

Dr. Barrett, who is also the Australasian president of the Appearance Medicine Society, could not tell exactly how many people have undergone Botox treatment in his country, but estimates the number had increased tenfold over the past five years. "Over the years that I've been using it on patients there has been an exponential increase because it is an extremely safe, very effective treatment," he said. "I haven't noted any deleterious effects which would lead me to have any concerns about the product... and over seven years of use and thousands of injections."

As much as 95 percent of users were women aged between 30 and 45. Most have the treatment about three times a year.

The British Medical Journal also reports incidences of people with cardiovascular problems or illnesses such as pneumonia dying from Botox use in other countries.

Botox has been approved for use in New-Zealand, but only for cosmetic purposes—for example, for the lines around the eyes and forehead, said senior medical officer Dr. Stewart Jessamine. Also, Botox has to be administered by a medical practitioner.

Source: *The New Zealand Herald*, 29 November 2002, <<http://www.nzherald.co.nz/storydisplay.cfm?storyID=3005905&thesection=news&thesubsection=general>>

Asian Americans Targeted for Tobacco Promotion

by Bob Burton

For the last 15 years, the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the United States have been the target of the tobacco industry to boost flagging sales and win allies to help defeat anti-smoking initiatives, tobacco control researchers say.

A team of four U.S. and Canadian researchers trawled through 500,000 pages of internal tobacco industry documents—made publicly available as a result of U.S. court cases—to investigate tobacco promotion strategies aimed at Asian American and Pacific Islanders, or the AAPI market in industry jargon.

Their findings in the September 2002 edition of *Tobacco Control*, published by the British Medical Journal, add to revelations that the tobacco industry developed detailed strategies for other specific groups including African Americans and the homosexual community.

Likewise, the strategies developed to target Asian Americans in the United States may well be used now in Asia, says Simon Chapman, editor of *Tobacco Control* and professor of public health and community medicine at the University of Sydney.

"In the tobacco industry, strategies that successfully boost sales in one country are quickly globalised. What works targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States today may well be used in Asia and the Pacific tomorrow," he said.

"The global tobacco companies' strategy is to compensate for declining sales in some countries such as the United States by boosting sales in regions such as Asia and the Pacific—where the protection of public health from tobacco is less advanced," Chapman said.

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The core features of the industry's strategies included emphasis on "Asian owned stores, direct marketing of specific cigarette brands through community cultural events, youth-orientated promotions, and corporate sponsorship," said *Tobacco Control*.

Driving the interest of the tobacco industry was the doubling of the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities in the United States to 7 million over the 1980s.

Two-thirds of the largest groups of Asian Americans—from China, the Philippines, Japan, India, Korea and Vietnam—were clustered in only five states including California and New York.

Three quarters of those from the Pacific Islands—predominantly Hawaii, Samoa and Guam—lived in California and Hawaii.

From a marketing perspective, the geographical concentrations of the communities and their relatively faster growth than other ethnic groups made them particularly attractive to the tobacco companies.

"Other tobacco companies are aware that this community, which is (generally) predisposed toward smoking, is a potential gold mine," said a 1990 document that the market research company Loiminchay prepared for the Lorillard Tobacco Co.

Central to the tobacco company's strategies that emerged was a corporate sponsorship programme aimed at key organisations and community events.

Chapman argues that corporate sponsorship by tobacco companies is a cynical exercise. "Corporate sponsorship by tobacco companies—while often presented as community-minded philanthropy—is always aimed at boosting sales and creating political allies to be mobilised when a tobacco control initiative threatens to curtail profits from their deadly products," he said.

RJ Reynolds sponsored groups such as the National Association of Asian American Journalists and the

Organization of Chinese Americans. Phillip Morris, the world's biggest tobacco company, sponsored events such as the Nisei Week Japanese Festival in Los Angeles.

The tobacco companies were also aware that Asian Americans were heavily represented among convenience store owners, reaching up to 80 percent of those in New York City and a thousand stores in southern California.

In 1993, for instance, a special team from RJ Reynolds met with the New York and Southern California chapters of Korean-American Grocers Association (KAGRO).

It agreed to sponsor one of the association's seminars at a cost of US\$10,000 to "address the membership regarding the negative impact of an increase in the FET (federal excise tax)."

The investment proved to be worthwhile, with all KAGRO chapters agreeing the following year to collect signatures from customers for a petition opposing tax increases.

When a local city council in Tennessee proposed legislation to ban smoking in public places, the alliance that the company developed proved critical. "The Memphis sales team quickly pooled together an impressive list of allies to confront the council. Contacts were made with the Tennessee and Memphis Restaurant Associations, the Korean-American Grocers and the Black Business Association," an RJ Reynolds lawyer boasted in the documents cited in *Tobacco Control*.

"The results were overwhelming. The smoking ban failed... And the bill's sponsor even voted against it!" the lawyer said.

While the most recent documents the researchers gained access to were from 1995, Chapman doubts little has changed today. "The documents unmask the invisible influence the industry used for decades—and still does—to expand its sales and profits at the expense of the health of tens of millions of people," he said.

"The pressing challenge now is to ensure that the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is strong enough to defeat the tobacco epidemic and protect public health," Chapman said, referring to an international agreement that the World Health Organisation is spearheading and which is under negotiation at present.

"We can't let tobacco industry lobbying result in a draft convention that is watered down in order to make it palatable to the tobacco industry," he added.

Source: Inter Press Service, <<http://www.ipsnews.net>>, 01 September 2002



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