AACR Praises New Cigarette Health Warnings as Significant Step Forward; Urges Continued Research to Reduce Tobacco Use

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — The American Association for Cancer Research applauds the bold new health warning labels for cigarette packages and advertisements unveiled today by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The new labels will be required no later than the fall of 2012, and are a major step forward in the fight against tobacco use, which is the single most preventable cause of premature death in the United States and is responsible for nearly a third of all cancer deaths.

“The new warnings use color graphics to depict the negative health consequences of smoking, including cancer, and are a dramatic advance over the virtually invisible text-only warnings on cigarette packages today,” said Roy S. Herbst, M.D., Ph.D., chairperson of the AACR Task Force on Tobacco and chief of medical oncology at Yale University. “These new labels offer an unprecedented opportunity to curb tobacco use. Research has shown that large, graphic warnings are an effective way to increase awareness about the dangers of tobacco, dissuade nonsmokers from starting to smoke, and motivate smokers to quit.”

The new warnings will cover the top half of the front and back of cigarette packages and will occupy at least 20 percent of all cigarette advertisements. These new health warning labels will also include the national toll-free Quit Line number, 1-800-QUIT-NOW. Importantly, the FDA has authority to use the latest scientific research to periodically revise the warnings to keep them original and effective.

“We congratulate the FDA on reaching this important milestone in implementing the Family Smoking Prevention and Control Act of 2009,” said Margaret Foti, Ph.D., M.D. (h.c.), chief executive officer of the AACR. “The multifaceted nature of the tobacco problem calls for collaboration between the research community and the FDA to ensure that scientific discovery keeps pace with the FDA’s progress in implementing this historic law. We look forward to supporting the FDA in ensuring a rigorous scientific evaluation of the impact the new warning labels have on different populations, especially minorities and people of lower socioeconomic status who face a disproportionate burden of disease as a result of higher rates of tobacco use.”

In 2010, the AACR released a comprehensive policy statement (Adobe Acrobat Reader required) on tobacco and cancer comprised of policy recommendations and a road map for future research to stem the tide of tobacco-related death and disease. The statement urged more stringent and effective warning labels based on scientific evidence and recommended inclusion of the 1-800-QUIT-NOW cessation resource in labels.

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The mission of the American Association for Cancer Research is to prevent and cure cancer. Founded in 1907, the AACR is the world’s oldest and largest professional organization dedicated to advancing cancer research. The membership includes 33,000 basic, translational and clinical researchers; health care professionals; and cancer survivors and advocates in the United States and more than 90 other countries. The AACR marshals the full spectrum of expertise from the cancer community to accelerate progress in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer through high-quality scientific and educational programs. It funds innovative, meritorious research grants, research fellowships and career development awards. The AACR Annual Meeting attracts more than 18,000 participants who share the latest discoveries and developments in the field. Special conferences throughout the year present novel data across a wide variety of topics in cancer research, treatment and patient care. Including Cancer Discovery, the AACR publishes seven major peer-reviewed journals: Cancer Research; Clinical Cancer Research; Molecular Cancer Therapeutics; Molecular Cancer Research; Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention; and Cancer Prevention Research. AACR journals represented 20 percent of the market share of total citations in 2009. The AACR also publishes CR, a magazine for cancer survivors and their families, patient advocates, physicians and scientists.

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