



A paper in the electronic edition of the journal *Science* by DMS geneticist Jay Dunlap, Ph.D., and colleagues has suggested the cellular clock has an anticancer as well as a time-keeping role.

## Some movie smoking is still rising

There is good news and bad news from Hollywood. The latest DMS study—in a nine-year effort to quantify the effects of movie smoking on young people—showed that across all ratings movies now contain less smoking. That's good news, since 80% of smokers begin before age 18.

"Because movie smoking is linked to adolescent smoking, it was important to us to clearly and quantitatively understand how and when cigarette use is depicted on-screen," says James Sargent, M.D., a professor of pediatrics and director of cancer control at Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center. The new study was released by the American Legacy Foundation, an organization devoted to keeping young people from smoking.

**Depictions:** A closer look reveals disquieting news rooted in the movie rating system, which classifies films for age-appropriate content—primarily language, violence, and sex. Sargent's team reviewed the 100 highest-grossing movies each year from 1996 to 2004. Most box-office hits carried ratings of G, PG, or PG-13. These movies are seen by three times as many youths as R-rated movies. And 75% of the films produced and rated for young people still contain depictions of tobacco. Although the percentage of youth-rated

movies with tobacco use has gone down, the absolute number of such movies has risen as studios gear more and more films to the young. This is the bad news.

"This trend may have implications for youth exposure, because, as the movie industry has shifted toward releasing a higher proportion of its movies with a youth rating, so has a higher share of movie smoking become youth-rated," the report said. The authors also proposed a solution: "Since movies are financed and produced with a target audience in mind, an R-rating for smoking would assure that movies intended for youth audiences would be smoke-free."

Sargent explains the recommendation: "The assumption is that the industry would strip the smoking from movies that are intended for the G to PG-13 range rather than risk an R rating, because they want to retain the adolescent segment of the viewer market." His team's report gives the Legacy Foundation and other groups fodder to continue lobbying studio heads, since any decision to alter the rating system rests primarily with them. "There are many public-health activists at state and local levels working on this issue," Sargent says. "We need to bring pressure to bear on the movie industry."

**Effect:** In addition to continuing to measure movie smoking, the DMS team has also started looking at another aspect of the issue. For that purpose, social psychologist Keilah Worth, Ph.D., joined the group a year ago. "I'm trying to get an idea of which kids are most vulnerable to the [movie] effect, why the effect might be happening," she says. "The psychological mechanism behind it is exactly what we're trying to figure out now. It is not the case that kids who are just going to smoke anyway watch these movies—that it doesn't matter because they're going to smoke anyway." ROSEMARY LUNARDINI



Smoking in youth-rated movies gets Sargent even more exercised than this vintage Camel poster.

### Seek and ye shall find

DMS researchers have shown once again that when it comes to cancer, the harder you look, the more you find. "The incidence of thyroid cancer in the United States more than doubled over the past 30 years," wrote Louise Davies, M.D., and H. Gilbert Welch, M.D., M.P.H., in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

But most of the cancers were two centimeters or smaller, and "mortality [from thyroid cancer] remained stable during this period," suggesting "that increased diagnostic scrutiny has caused [the] apparent increase."

### Etude in D minor

Watchful waiting, though a time-honored practice for many conditions, may not be the best choice for patients with minor depression who seek help. Only 9% to 13% of patients improved after a month of watchful waiting in a small study conducted by Dartmouth psychiatrists and psychologists. The findings also suggest that encouraging "regular engagement in active pleasant events" and discouraging "avoidant coping styles" may be beneficial interventions. "Developing evidence-based self-help materials along with aggressive dissemination measures could have a significant impact," they concluded in their paper, published in *General Hospital Psychiatry*. ■

