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Oral Cancer Foundation Calls for FDA Authority Over Tobacco Marketers

Senate to Soon Review Version of Bill Recently Passed by House of Representatives

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif., April 16 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- **The Oral Cancer Foundation** today called for the U.S. Senate to grant the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authority over tobacco products in response to the tobacco industry's most aggressive marketing campaign targeted at women and girls in over a decade. The U.S. House of Representatives voted to give the FDA such authority approximately two weeks ago.

"The percentage of oral cancer patients represented by women has increased tremendously over the past four decades, and we believe the marketing efforts of the tobacco industry is a major causal factor," said Brian Hill, founder of **the Oral Cancer Foundation**. "Before Virginia Slims began aggressively targeting women in the 1960s, roughly one-in-ten oral cancer victims was female. Since then, the ratio has quintupled to one-in-two." Hill also noted that lung cancer surpassed breast cancer as the number one cancer killer of women in 1987, and that while overall cancer rates are declining for men and women, lung cancer is not declining among women. Moreover, smoking puts women and girls at greater risk of a wide range of other deadly diseases, including heart attacks, strokes and emphysema.

Hill cited "Deadly in Pink: Big Tobacco Steps Up Its Targeting of Women and Girls," a comprehensive report recently issued by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. The report studied numerous tobacco marketing campaigns, images from which can be found at www.tobaccofreekids.org/deadlyinpink.

"In reading this report, three conclusions seem inescapable," said Hill. "First, the marketing campaigns of the leading tobacco companies have -- unfortunately -- been extremely effective. Second, the managements of these companies have a complete disregard for the health of the women and girls they are attempting to persuade to smoke their cigarettes. And third, the inability of these companies to voluntarily engage in safe and responsible behavior dictates that the FDA must be given authority to regulate their marketing activities."

As the "Deadly in Pink" report documents, the nation's two largest tobacco companies -- Philip Morris USA and R.J. Reynolds -- have recently deployed new marketing campaigns that romance cigarette smoking as feminine and fashionable. In late 2008, Philip Morris USA repackaged its Virginia Slims brand into "purse packs" -- small, rectangular cigarette packs that contain "superslim" cigarettes. Available in mauve and teal and half the size of regular cigarette packs, the sleek "purse packs" emulate cosmetics containers and are clearly designed to fit in small purses. Their "Superslims Lights" and "Superslims Ultra Lights" nomenclature is consistent with the tobacco industry's history of associating smoking with weight control and of appealing to women's health concerns with misleading claims such as "light" and "low-tar."

In 2007, R.J. Reynolds launched a new version of its Camel cigarettes, packaged in shiny black boxes with hot pink and teal borders. The product is named Camel No. 9, which evokes the famous Chanel No. 9 perfume, and is supported by magazine advertising featuring flowery imagery and vintage fashions. The ads incorporated slogans such as "Light and luscious" and "Now available in stiletto," the latter referring to a thin version of the cigarette pitched to "the most fashion forward woman." Ads ran in magazines popular with women and girls, including Vogue, Glamour, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire and InStyle. Promotional giveaways included flavored lip balm, cell phone jewelry, tiny purses and wristbands, all in hot pink.

Despite being the nation's number one cause of preventable death, tobacco products currently are virtually exempt from regulation. The aggressiveness of these new marketing campaigns has led other organizations, including the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, to call for Congress to grant the FDA authority over tobacco products. To that end, on April 2, 2009, the House of Representatives voted to give the FDA such authority. The Senate is expected to begin reviewing its version of the bill, which is co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) and U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA), later in the month. This legislation would:

- Restrict tobacco marketing in stores frequented and publications read by teens to black-and-white text only.
- Ban all remaining tobacco industry sponsorships of sports and entertainment events.
- Ban misleading health claims such as "light" and "low-tar" and strictly regulate all health claims about tobacco products.
- Require larger, more effective health warnings on tobacco packages and advertising.
- Require tobacco companies to disclose the contents of their products, as well as changes in products and research about their health effects.
- Grant the FDA authority to require changes in new and existing tobacco products to protect public health, such as the reduction or removal of harmful ingredients.

"This legislation would not be necessary were it not for the tobacco industry's long, reprehensible and irresponsible history of targeting women and girls with ads attempting to portray smoking as fashionable, liberating and a viable means of weight control," said Hill. "From ads in the 1920s urging women to 'reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet,' to Virginia Slims' condescending ads in the 1960s telling women 'You've come a long way, Baby,' to the recent product launch of Camel No. 9, tobacco marketers have continually demonstrated that their concern for the health of their bottom line is primary while their concern for the health of the American female is nonexistent."

In the U.S., each year tobacco use kills more than 400,000 people and costs the nation \$96 billion in health care. About 90 percent of adult smokers start in their teens or earlier. Every day, another 1,000 kids become regular smokers, and one-third of them will die prematurely as a result.

The Oral Cancer Foundation, founded by oral cancer survivor Brian R. Hill, is a non-profit 501(c) 3, public service charity that provides information, support, and advocacy related to this disease. It maintains a Web site at <http://www.oralcancer.org>, which receives millions of hits per month. At the forefront of this year's agenda is the drive to promote solid awareness in the minds of the American public about the need to undergo an annual oral cancer screening, and an outreach to the dental community to provide this service as a matter of routine practice. Supporting the foundation's goals is a scientific advisory board composed of leading cancer authorities from varied medical and dental specialties, and from prominent cancer educational, treatment, and research institutions in the United States.

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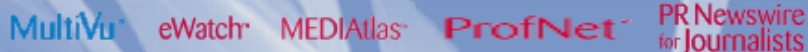
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