

Lifetime costs of tobacco smoking

C Ross Philpot

TO THE EDITOR: A patient of mine recently reported that she had had a busy week, with the death and funeral of her sister. The woman had died with lung cancer at the age of 77, after having smoked tobacco for 61 years from the age of 17.

On further enquiry, I was informed that the woman had “smoked all day and all night”, at the rate of 60 to 80 cigarettes per day. People could hardly stand to visit her home because “the house was always full of smoke”. Two different brands were used, including packs of 40. She had required oxygen therapy for the past 12 to 18 months and was severely disabled by breathlessness. She would “chain smoke”, with one cigarette behind each ear and one in her mouth. Rather than light them with a match or cigarette lighter, she would light her next cigarette from the butt of the one she was just finishing.

At an average of 70 cigarettes every day for 60 years, the total intake amounts to around 1 500 000 cigarettes. At, say, 50c for each cigarette, this equates to a cost of \$35 a day or \$12 775 for a single year. A principal reason for taking the trouble to offer this anecdote for publication is that this is the greatest number of cigarettes I have ever heard of being smoked by any one person.

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Further reading

- 1 Philpot CR. The real costs of lifetime tobacco usage [letter]. *Med J Aust* 2008; 188: 550.
- 2 Simons LA, Simons J, McCallum J, Friedlander Y. Impact of smoking, diabetes and hypertension on survival time in the elderly: the Dubbo Study. *Med J Aust* 2005; 182: 219-222.
- 3 Zwar N. Smoking cessation — what works? *Aust Fam Physician* 2008; 37: 10-14.
- 4 Eastley T, Cowan J. Plan aims to save smokers money [transcript]. *AM* 2008; 9 May. <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2008/s2239858.htm> (accessed Nov 2010).
- 5 Conan Doyle A. The adventure of the golden pince-nez. In: *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*. London: Penguin Books, 2009. □