In contrast with the overall declining rate of lung cancer in the U.S., the rate of death from the disease among women has actually remained steady, or even risen, in some areas of the country. These findings [1], published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, suggest [2] the limitations of the public health campaigns and state policies typically credited with bringing down the country’s overall smoking and lung cancer rates.

As recent studies have reported [3], lung cancer death rates among U.S. women under age 50 are not declining at the promising rate observed in the country as a whole. Recognizing that differences in both sociodemographic makeup and anti-tobacco measures might result in a regional variation in smoking prevalence, a group of researchers from the American Cancer Society and the National Cancer Institute decided to investigate the issue. By comparing national mortality data with lung cancer death rates among more than one million U.S. white women aged 35 to 84 in 23 different states, spanning the three-and-a-half decades from 1973 to 2007, the researchers were able to identify significantly elevated rates among women younger than 50, especially in Southern and Midwestern states.

Specifically, the researchers found that, while lung cancer death rates had continued to decline among white women in California and New York, the rate in some other states declined less quickly, or even increased, among women younger than 50. In fact, in some Southern states, lung cancer death rates among women born in the 1960s were about double those of women born in the 1930s.

One can only speculate about the reasons for these pockets of troubling statistics, but the study’s lead author, Dr. Ahmedin Jemal, suggests that weak anti-smoking policies might be part of the reason that more women are dying from lung cancer in pockets of the U.S. There may be something to that, given that California, recognized for its aggressive anti-smoking policies, was the exception to the study’s findings.

But ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom has a different take. Since lung cancer takes decades to develop, we are seeing the effects of a change of behavior in women in the 70s and 80s. Some of this is undoubtedly due to tobacco companies having taken advantage of the nascent women’s rights movement. Certain brands of cigarettes were marketed exclusively for women as if the ability to smoke somehow equated with equal rights. Pretty disgusting.

Still, ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross cannot agree with Dr. Jemal’s conclusion that we must “find a way to get the message out that smoking is hazardous.” “The message is already out,” says Dr. Ross.
"Anti-smoking campaigns have done that work quite well everyone knows that smoking is hazardous, although they are not fully aware of smoking’s manifold dangers. What’s necessary now is the promotion of better smoking cessation methods, such as harm reduction, which makes use of the reduced risk tobacco- and nicotine-delivery products we know are effective."

It’s a point that brings us to our next item which, unfortunately, only goes to show what’s not working.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2012/06/28/youve-come-a-long-way-baby-not
Links
[1] http://hwmaint.jco.ascopubs.org/cgi/content/abstract/JCO.2012.42.6098v1