

On Call: A Patient Education Feature

The Barking Dog

Essay By Richard P. Holm, MD

Photo By Judith R. Peterson, MD

Have you ever tried to sleep while the neighbor's dog barked all night outside your bedroom window? I submit that in the middle of the night, the right of that neighbor to have a dog becomes less important than your right and the rights of the neighborhood to have a decent night's sleep.

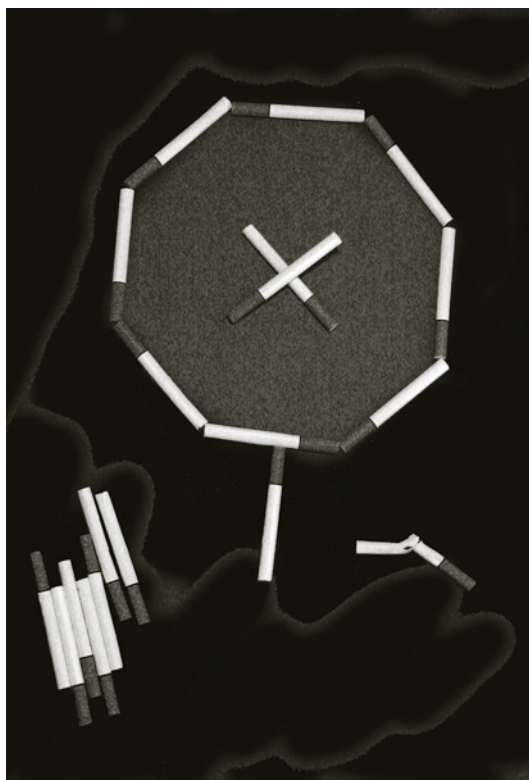
Choice is important for all of us. The U.S. Constitution says that our society should protect every individual's right to make his or her own choices in life, as long as those choices do not impose unduly on the rights of others.

This is even one of the top three ethical principles by which physicians and all care providers operate. Any treatment must first allow for the protection for each individual's freedom to choose. This right of self-direction is also called the Principle of Autonomy.

But this protected right of self-direction should not impose on the health and quality of the life of others.

The big argument often cited against passing smoke-free legislation is that it would take away the freedom of choice for smokers and business owners. Of course, protecting individual choice is a major principle our leaders must consider in providing direction for government.

However, protecting the freedom to choose is the very reason that we need to support smoke-free laws.



We should protect the choice of any person to be in a restaurant or any public place and not to be compelled to breathe the smoke of another's cigarette because tobacco smoke is more than a nuisance. Indeed, for some it can trigger immediate and even life-threatening breathing problems.

But the most important reason to pass this bill is because our society should protect workers who are presently stuck, employed in a smoke-filled environment. Without a new law, their only choice is to quit their job – which often is not a viable option at all.

Someone needs to quiet that barking dog.

This editorial was written by Dr. Rick Holm for "On Call," a weekly program about health on South Dakota Public Broadcasting-Television that is produced by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. "On Call" airs Thursdays on South Dakota Public Broadcasting-Television at 7 p.m. Central, 6 p.m. Mountain.

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