



## CASE REPORT

1. Complaint reference number 53/08
2. Advertiser Queensland Health (Which Disease?)
3. Product Community Awareness
4. Type of advertisement TV
5. Nature of complaint Discrimination or vilification Disability – section 2.1
6. Date of determination Wednesday, 12 March 2008
7. DETERMINATION Dismissed

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement shows a woman buying cigarettes, and as the seller places a packet on the counter she decides "I'd rather not have mouth cancer - can you give me something else?". A supermarket checkout operator holds up two cigarette packets to a woman being served and asks "Do you want heart disease or lung cancer?" A man buying cigarettes has two packs placed on the counter as the seller says "Take your pick". The man replies "I just take gangrene" and selects one of the packets. A male voiceover warns "You can't choose which disease you'll actually get, but if you continue smoking, you'll almost certainly get one of them." A man collecting cigarettes from a vending machine tells a girl alongside him "I knew I'd get emphysema."

## THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

*I feel the new smoking advertisement is making illness seem unimportant. The guy who gets the packet and says "I knew I'd get gangrene." The seller asks "do you want lung cancer or heart disease." I have heart disease and didn't smoke. Gangrene can be a diabetic's worst nightmare. I realise what the aim of the advertisement is, however I feel it makes light of illnesses. It portrays the smoker as not caring and makes the illness not important.*

## THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complaint/s regarding this advertisement included the following:

*The 'Which Disease' campaign was produced by the New South Wales Cancer Institute through the agency Campaign Palace/Red Cell, originating from research conducted with the target market in 2005. This initial formative research informed a number of quit smoking campaigns built around the Commonwealth Government's legislation requiring health warning labels on all cigarette packaging. This legislation was introduced in 2006.*

*The 'Which Disease' campaign has been broadcast in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory to date.*

*In Queensland, the 'Which Disease' television advertisement commenced on 1 January and is scheduled to conclude w/c 13 April this year.*

*The current Quit Campaign in Queensland is run in partnership between Queensland Health and The Cancer Council Queensland. Calls to the Quitline have increased since the campaign commenced and over 350 requests for quitting information have been received via SMS response.*

*Formative research found that smokers try to avoid graphic health warnings on cigarette packs by*

asking for a “less confronting” image at point of purchase or by hiding their packs. The ‘Which Disease’ concept therefore had very high personal relevance to smokers by showing their real-life behaviour in response to the graphic health warnings.

Focus testing found the ‘Which Disease’ concept mirrored actual smokers’ behaviour and encouraged them to self-assess their attempts at avoiding their addiction and health risks. Smokers liked the concept for this aspect. Furthermore the concept had the cumulative power of presenting smokers with a list of smoking related diseases, leaving smokers with a sense of the inevitability of being affected by at least one of them.

The three key messages taken from the concept during testing are:

- Smoking is associated with a range of different diseases
- People who continue to smoke will eventually get one of these diseases
- Smokers are kidding themselves by dismissing the warning labels

Encouraging smokers to consider the real dangers of their behaviour and quit is a complex task and Queensland Health, along with its state counterparts, employs a range of strategies to support positive behaviour change including legislation and regulation, services and programs and social marketing and mass media activity.

The Quit Campaign broadcasts a range of advertising material that focuses on different health messages related to smoking. These messages are also communicated in a variety of styles which include the use of graphic images, emotional appeals, humour, irony and everyday smoking behaviour.

The “Which Disease” advertisement uses the everyday behaviour of purchasing cigarettes, a moment which smokers identify with, in an ironical way. Smokers report that they purposely avoid the more graphic labels, or the ones they don’t like, when purchasing cigarettes. However, regardless of their choice of packaging, the reality is, that if they continue to smoke, it is highly likely that they will develop one of the diseases depicted. The advertising also serves to reinforce the serious health warning messages on cigarette packaging.

Although the advertisement uses elements of light heartedness in its portrayal of the purchasing behaviour, the subtext is that smokers should be taking their behaviour and the possible consequences extremely seriously.

It is certainly not the intention of the advertising to make light of the illnesses, in fact, the key message is the seriousness of this potential in contrast to point of purchase behaviour, where smokers feel they can avoid them by making a different choice.

Queensland Health acknowledges that people can develop the diseases and illnesses depicted on warning labels and in this advertisement without smoking. However, tobacco smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death and illness in Australia and the Quit Campaign supports a reduction in prevalence by using a range of means to attempt to get important health messages to people who smoke and encourage positive behaviour change.

It is also certainly not the intention of the advertising to in any way depict or comment on members of the community who may have any of the diseases or illnesses in the advertisement. It is to portray the irony in the behaviour of some people who smoke in an attempt to communicate the seriousness of the consequences of smoking to all smokers and encourage quitting behaviour.

## **THE DETERMINATION**

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board considered that the advertisement was an attempt to engage smokers with the use of self-deprecating humour. It noted that this was an anti-smoking advertisement with which viewers could engage as it depicted every-day activities.

The Board further considered the references to the diseases were an important part of the public health message designed to raise awareness of smoking and to encourage quitting smoking. Although upsetting to some viewers, the Board considered the references to the diseases in the advertisement did not breach the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.