

# The fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction

Following the publication of the 'Tobacco Free Ireland' policy document by the Minister for Health, James Reilly, **Dr Ross Morgan** looks at the initiatives being implemented to reduce smoking prevalence in Ireland.



ASH Ireland welcomes the recent announcement by the Minister for Health, James Reilly that he will continue to introduce a range of initiatives which will hopefully reduce smoking prevalence and the annual multi-million Euro health spend on tobacco related disease in this country.

## ASH Ireland

ASH Ireland was established over 20 years ago to highlight the health risks associated with smoking and advocate for change in health and environmental legislation, which would assist in the denormalisation of smoking. In the early 90's over 7,000 people were dying in Ireland each year from the effects of tobacco, and over 30% of the population was smoking. Through various measures which have been advocated for by ASH Ireland and its partners - and supported by legislation, the number of annual deaths has now been reduced to just over 5,000 and smoking prevalence has been reduced to 21.7%.

## Tobacco Products Directive

The recent support of the Tobacco Products Directive by the European Parliament (8th October) will also assist the ongoing fight against tobacco in the medium to longer term. The decision to introduce graphic images throughout the EU, which

will cover 65% of both sides and the top of all cigarette packs on sale in the region, is particularly important.

## Initiatives and Legislative Change

Since 1990 tobacco advertising has been banned on all print and electronic media, the workplace smoking legislation has been introduced, the promotion of tobacco products has been banned in retail outlets, and other initiatives are now being implemented which will have an impact on the overall health of the nation and the spend on tobacco related disease. ASH Ireland has been a strong advocate and a leading player in the introduction of all initiatives introduced to date and is determined to continue to highlight the harmful effects of smoking, the activities of the Tobacco Industry and the need constantly to use legislative change, as well as promotion, to fight against the normalisation of smoking and protect our young people from the scourge of addiction.

## Proposed ban on smoking in cars transporting children

In 2007 ASH Ireland contacted the then Minister for Health, Mary Harney, with a proposal that smoking in cars transporting children should be banned. We organised a seminar for a range of interested parties, in Dublin, in 2012 to develop further support for this initiative. We researched this initiative, which had been introduced in some parts of the United States and Canada and presented a paper to the Department of Health. In 2012 the ASH Ireland initiative, which by then had the support of Minister James Reilly, was embraced by Senator John Crown who produced draft legislation. This health measure will hopefully be implemented in 2014. Unfortunately, 1 in 7 Irish children are subjected to the effects of second-hand smoke while travelling in motor vehicles. This is totally unacceptable,

as second-hand smoke is much more harmful to children than to adults and is especially damaging to those with respiratory ailments, such as asthma. We are very pleased that in the very near future all of our children under 18 years of age will be able to travel in motor vehicles which are free of the harmful carcinogens and other harmful particles contained in environmental tobacco smoke.

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## Smoke-Free Playgrounds

In 2011 ASH Ireland contacted all County and City Councils proposing that they voluntarily introduce smoke-free playgrounds. The response to this initiative has been hugely positive to date with 75% of County and 60% of City Councils having introduced or have made a decision to introduce smoke-free playgrounds. This initiative will not only assist with the denormalisation of smoking for children, but will also have a positive environmental impact, as many of our playgrounds are littered with tobacco butts. We would encourage those County/City Councils who have not as yet responded to this initiative to consider it positively, by either simply erecting smoke-free

signs in the playground or introducing a bye-law which would make the play area smoke-free.

### Third Level College Campuses

In January 2011 my predecessor, Dr Brian Maurer, contacted all third level colleges in Ireland asking them to consider introducing smoke-free campuses. 'Smoke-free third level college campuses' has become a major health initiative in the United States, with well over 1,000 colleges now being 'no smoking zones'. Some colleges have introduced this by way of a local rule, and others have enshrined the initiative in state legislation.

ASH Ireland organised a seminar in Dublin in late 2011, which was attended by five third level colleges who had expressed an interest in our smoke-free campus proposal. We had meetings with Trinity College and several meetings with University College Dublin (UCD), who wished to explore this initiative further. Thankfully both of these colleges now seem to be moving forward with the necessary consultation and decision making, which will be required to introduce what would be the first smoke-free college campus in Europe. ASH Ireland also prepared a toolkit for our third level colleges which would assist them in considering and developing a smoke-free campus initiative, and we believe that colleges are finding this to be of assistance.

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### Extinguishing the link between Sport and Tobacco

Potentially, the most significant initiative in which we are engaged, is the encouragement of our main sporting bodies, the FAI, the IRFU,

and the GAA to introduce entirely smoke-free stadia at local, regional and national level. This initiative, if introduced, would have a massive impact on the denormalisation of smoking for young people. Thankfully, the new Aviva Stadium is entirely smoke-free, and Croke Park is 'non smoking' within the stadium area. Many people will have noted that the UEFA soccer championships in 2012 were entirely smoke-free and recently it was announced that the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014 will also be entirely smoke-free.

It is abundantly clear to all of us in ASH Ireland that sporting bodies all around the world are ridding themselves of the link between tobacco and sport. This has even applied to sports such as snooker and motor racing. We feel that our main sporting bodies could take the lead and set an example for similar organisations all around the world, if they could find a way of proceeding with a 100% smoke-free stadia initiative. There will of course be some teething problems but with sound leadership this initiative is possible and we encourage them to keep it on the agenda. Tobacco should have no association with sport and fitness, as it is well established medically that smoking is a major obstacle to achieving full health and fitness.

### Introduction of Plain Packaging

ASH Ireland has been a strong supporter of Minister James Reilly's initiative to introduce plain packaging on all cigarette packets on sale in Ireland. Minister Reilly is following a very successful and brave decision made by the Australian government in this area. It is very clear that the Tobacco Industry will fight the plain packaging initiative with every means at its disposal, as they did in Australia, and it is important that Minister Reilly has the support of all political parties, and all responsible interested parties in introducing this ground-breaking health

initiative. Ireland set the example for others to follow in introducing the workplace smoking ban, and we can now take the lead in Europe with the introduction of plain packaging.

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*“sporting bodies all around the world are ridding themselves of the link between tobacco and sport”*

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### Conclusion

As indicated earlier, deaths from smoking in Ireland are approximately 5,200 per year. This is a dreadful and totally unacceptable statistic. It is also well established that over €1 billion is spent by our health services on tobacco related disease every year. It is fully accepted that much has been achieved in the fight against tobacco and nicotine addiction in this country, but there is much more to be done. All initiatives which can reduce smoking prevalence and protect our young people from experimenting with tobacco, should have the support of every organisation and commercial entity on the island.

**Dr. Ross Morgan is the Chairperson of ASH Ireland and a Consultant Respiratory Physician with Beaumont Hospital.**



*Plain or standardised packaging means all cigarette packs will look the same. They are packaged in a standard shape without branding, design or a logo.*