



STATUTORY WARNING: TOBACCO DID THIS TO US

Cancer survivors lobby for their photos to be used on cigarette and gutkha packets so consumers get the real picture

Lata.Mishra
@timesgroup.com

They're willing to turn their most painful experience, captured in hair-raising photographs, into publicity material against tobacco.

Oral cancer survivors Shashi Tiwari, 45, Manoj Mishra, 43 and Ashish Jain, 40, are part of a movement seeking pictorial warnings – of their own faces distorted by the disease – to actually knock the wind out of tobacco users when they reach for that cigarette packet or gutkha sachet.

Currently, written warnings on cigarette packets are accompanied by an innocuous image of lungs and those on gutkha sachets have the picture of a scorpion – the connection between this symbol and the disease is unclear.

Seeking to give consumers the real picture, groups Doctors for You, Indian Medical Association (IMA) and Association of Medical Consultants (AMC), supported by Tata Cancer hospital, Parel, are lobbying for a change. They want to protect people from the addiction that causes 20 lakh deaths every year in the country.

They are using these pictures to garner support for their signature campaign, which already has 70 cancer patients as signatories. The activists will attach the images to a petition they intend to file in the



Ashish Jain, 40, was diagnosed with mouth cancer after 15 yrs of gutkha use



Manoj Mishra, 43, smoked and consumed gutkha for 7 years



Shashi Tiwari, 45, lost half his tongue to cancer. He had used gutkha for 20 yrs

high courts of four major cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata. The petition wants tobacco companies to include these images on the packaging.

Tiwari, a resident of Bhandup who lost half his tongue to cancer, said, "I could not taste anything and swallowing was extremely painful. If I had seen such images before getting addicted to gutkha, I would definitely not have used it."

Mishra, an Allahabad advocate, regrets he can't practice his profession effectively any more because of his mouth cancer. "I can't talk as one part of my jaw hangs down," he said.

Jain, who is a saree seller in Madhya Pradesh, added, "My customers often ask me what happened after they see my face. I use this

opportunity to tell them never to use tobacco. I want to spread this message to everyone."

In 2008, after pressure from NGOs, the health ministry decided to use pictorial warnings. Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, Associate Professor, Head and Neck Department, Tata Memorial Hospital said, "As per the rules, the images must be rotated every year. However, they have used the same warnings for the past two years."

New warnings were supposed to be implemented on December 1, 2010 but the central government decided, on December 7, to defer the implementation by a year.

He added, "India stands hundredth in the list of countries using images effectively to deter tobacco

use. Other Asian countries use real images."

Dr P C Gupta of Healix-Sekhsaria Institute for Public health, pointed out the current images were ineffective. "In 2009, we conducted a survey in four cities and realised people don't understand the message," he said.

Dr Ravikant Singh, member of Doctors for You, said, "It is easier for people who cannot read or write to get the message with these images."

Customs Commissioner Deepak Kumar, who is fighting a case against a tobacco major for alleged lack of adequate warning, said, "I am ready to contribute my own images before surgery if it prevents people from using tobacco."