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FROM “VITAL SIGNS” TO A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: MOVING THE NEEDLE ON SMOKING CESSATION

*Michael C. Fiore, M.D., M.P.H. Named
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Innovator*

(Princeton, NJ, July 23, 2003) – Michael C. Fiore, M.D., M.P.H. can easily reel off numerous facts and figures on smoking. Just over 23 percent of adults in America smoke. Smoking adds \$100 billion to the nation’s health care bill each year and another \$100 billion in lost productivity. The fact that touches him most deeply, however, is that one of every five deaths in the U.S. is caused by tobacco use. These deaths, he says, are preventable... and they disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged members of our society.

Fiore, a world-renowned scientist and practicing physician who put smoking status on the radar screen for the majority of his medical colleagues as a “vital sign” that they must monitor, wants to help at least five million Americans quit smoking each year, preventing approximately three million premature deaths. It’s all part of a far-reaching national action plan he has developed and is trying to convince the federal government to adopt. The plan involves establishing a Smokers Health Fund through a tobacco excise tax increase, a national “quit line,” a massive media campaign, counseling, research and many other elements. Fiore will use funds from a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Innovators Combating Substance Abuse award he has just received to disseminate the recommendations of this national action plan.

Fiore and four others were recently named Innovators as part of a program that recognizes leaders in the fields of substance abuse prevention, treatment, and policy development, brings attention to their groundbreaking work and provides an opportunity for them to undertake projects they might not otherwise be able to complete.

“Unless the prevalence of tobacco use is cut dramatically,” says Fiore, who is professor of medicine at the University of Wisconsin Medical School and founding director of the University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention, “about 24 million Americans – one out of two current smokers – will die prematurely of a disease directly caused by their dependence on tobacco.” Many policy-makers may be inclined to listen to Fiore: he chaired the panel that produced the most influential guide on smoking cessation -- the Clinical Practice Guideline for Treating Tobacco Dependence. Almost two million copies of the guideline have been distributed and its recommendations have been widely adopted by the medical community.

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A national program supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation® with direction and technical assistance provided by the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Witnessing the Devastation of Addiction and Smoking at an Early Age

Raised in a poor neighborhood in Boston, Fiore lost two of his closest friends to substance abuse before high school graduation and watched how addiction devastated his neighborhood. He also saw how his mother, a smoker, suffered from heart disease. “These experiences helped drive my decision to become a physician,” he says. “In the 1950s and 1960s we saw tobacco move to attack and kill the least advantaged members of society – the poorest, the least educated, and women, who were smoking at higher rates. Dedicating my medical career to this avoidable toll seemed to be a natural focus.”

Fiore’s experiences during his medical residency at Boston City Hospital strengthened his resolve to reduce the impact of tobacco. “The wards of Boston City, which provide care to those in greatest medical need, were filled with the deleterious effects of substance abuse, such as emphysema and cancer,” he says. “We suffer an especially devastating burden from tobacco use, a very personal toll. Children are deprived of parents, individuals lose friends.”

Smoking Status Becomes a “Vital Sign”

Because of Fiore’s work, smoking status is now one of the vital signs America’s medical community must monitor -- a move that has saved many lives. The development of the new vital sign was based on years of research and practical efforts in clinical settings by Fiore, first at the U.S. Office on Smoking and Health, and later at the University of Wisconsin. As early as 1992, Fiore developed strategies to prompt physicians to counsel patients to quit smoking. Realizing that clinicians and health delivery systems all view and accept the vital signs (blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate, and temperature) as an essential component of every office or bedside visit, he proposed expanding these signs to include smoking status, publishing his proposal as a commentary in *JAMA*. Fiore then obtained National Institutes of Health funding to test the impact of this proposal, and documented in 1995 that this simple, no-cost institutional change more than doubled the rate of smoker identification and the rate at which clinicians counseled smokers to quit.

In 1994, Fiore published an editorial in *JAMA*: “Smoking Cessation Treatment and the Good Doctor Club.” He emphasized the role of the clinician in confronting tobacco dependence and pointed out that 70 percent of smokers see a primary care clinician each year. Given that clinical intervention is associated with substantial increases in tobacco cessation rates, clinicians were losing a great opportunity to convince smokers to quit.

During the same year, Fiore, appointed chairman of a new expert federal expert panel charged with the task of writing the first evidence-based guideline for smoking cessation, led a review of more than 3,000 published articles and helped to conduct more than 50 meta-analyses of scientific papers on the topic. As a result, in 1996 the panel published Smoking Cessation Clinical Practice Guideline. The updated guideline, published by the United States Health Service in 2000 as *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence*, is recognized as the standard of care for treating tobacco dependence.

Michael C. Fiore/ 3

Following publication of the guidelines, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation asked Fiore to direct a new national program office, Addressing Tobacco in Managed Care. The office is designed to stimulate managed care organizations to adopt innovative evidence-based institutional changes that will increase the rates of smoking cessation among enrollees. Since the program began, it has awarded more than 25 grants to managed care organization-researcher partnerships, resulting in some of the most innovative systems-level substance abuse research conducted to date.

A National Plan for Smoking Cessation

Fiore plans to use his Innovators award to promulgate the recommendations of the National Action Plan for Tobacco Cessation, which he recently helped develop as chair of the Subcommittee on Cessation of the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health. The plan calls for the establishment of a federally funded National Tobacco Quitline, an ongoing media campaign to help Americans quit, evidence-based counseling and medications for tobacco cessation, research on the effectiveness of tobacco treatment programs, and training and education for clinicians. A Smokers Health Fund, established through a \$2 per pack excise tax increase would pay for this ambitious initiative.

As an Innovator, Fiore will convene a series of meetings in partnership with federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations and others to begin to effect the policy changes. He will also create and update a report card to monitor the progress of the federal government and other partners in implementing these policy changes.

Innovators Combating Substance Abuse is a national program of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that recognizes and rewards those who have made substantial, innovative contributions of national significance in the field of substance abuse. Each award includes a grant of \$300,000, which is used to conduct a project over a period of up to three years that advances the field. The program addresses problems related to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, through education advocacy, treatment and policy research and reform at the national, state and local levels. The Innovators program is run by a national program office at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

For additional information on the Innovators Combating Substance Abuse program, please visit the Web site: www.SAInnovators.org. For a complete press kit, please visit <http://newsroom.mbooth.com/sainnovators/>.

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NOTE TO LOCAL EDITORS: Michael Fiore is a resident of Madison, Wisconsin.