

LETTERS

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIME MINISTER/SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH

Standardised (“plain”) packaging of cigarettes regulations must be passed before the general election

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More than half a million children have taken up smoking since the government first announced it would consult on plain standardised packaging of cigarette packs in 2011,^{1,2} and every day hundreds more join them.³

After a strongly supportive government commissioned independent review of the evidence,⁴ the public health minister said she wanted to introduce the necessary regulations in this Parliament.⁵ Unfortunately, despite successful implementation and growing popularity in Australia,^{6,9} the government is yet to make a final decision and is using the requirement to complete the process of notification to Europe, which runs until 2 March 2015, as an excuse for further delay.¹⁰ This is a complete red herring. After notification is complete it will be possible to vote on the regulations without the need for further revision, but in the interim the UK government has to take the necessary steps to make a vote possible.¹¹ By mid-January the government must table the regulations so that parliamentary scrutiny processes can be completed in time. Parliament voted overwhelmingly in support of the primary legislation to bring in this measure,¹² and the Conservatives’ coalition partners and the official opposition have committed to find the necessary parliamentary time to debate and vote on the regulations.¹³

This is not a matter of European bureaucracy preventing the UK from going ahead; it is a matter of political will. Delay is the key goal of tobacco companies.¹⁴ As health professionals, we need to know if the prime minister and secretary of state for health will now stand up to the tobacco industry and make the same commitment to introduce standardised tobacco packaging, or will they betray public health by blocking this key measure?

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Full list of signatories at: www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g5061/rr/828299.

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