

As I See It

Restrict smoking to protect our health

By Michael Munger
Special to The Star

John and Betty were patients of mine, dating back to the start of my practice in Overland Park 19 years ago. John was a smoker, and unfortunately died of emphysema 10 years ago at the age of 67. He and Betty had been married 45 years. Shortly after John's death, Betty came to me complaining of shortness of breath. She was diagnosed with progressive lung disease. The saddest fact of all: Betty never smoked a day in her life.

This is just one example of the effects of secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke is a public health issue. During an eight-hour shift, a nonsmoking employee at a smoking establishment will inhale the secondhand smoke equivalent of three-fourths of a pack of cigarettes. Employees who are exposed to secondhand smoke on the job are 34 percent more likely to get lung cancer.

There is a 50 percent increased chance of experiencing a stroke with exposure to recurrent secondhand smoke, such as you get in restaurants.

The effects of secondhand smoke are not confined only to employees in the workplace or adults. Children exposed to secondhand smoke have higher rates of illness than children who are not exposed.

The exposure of secondhand smoke does not have to occur over long periods of time either. According to the journal *Circulation*, most of the toxic effects of secondhand smoke occur within 5 minutes of exposure. Heart damage similar to that of a habitual smoker can be seen with only 30 minutes of environmental exposure.

Secondhand smoke exposure causes lung cancer, head and neck cancers, coronary artery disease, stroke and AIDS. It has been seen to cause asthma exacerbation in adults and children, exacerbation of recurrent bronchitis and pneumonia, ear infections, chronic respiratory infections and low birth weight in children. It is even now being shown to impair a child's ability to learn, by causing neurotoxicity at even low levels.

Elected officials in Kansas City have an obligation to protect the citizens. This is a public health issue, not a financial issue. Their obligation is to protect us, not preserve the economic interests of a few. We are looking to them to provide leadership. They should do their duty and make the only rational decision.

Support a smoke-free Overland Park, Mission, Kansas City, Prairie Village, Shawnee, Lenexa, Leawood, Independence, Lee's Summit, Olathe and Parkville.

Michael Munger is a spokesperson for Clean Air Kansas City. He lives in Overland Park.