

FPH withdraws from responsibility deals

The Faculty of Public Health is withdrawing from the responsibility deals following recent reports the government will not be introducing standardised packs for tobacco or a minimum unit price for alcohol.

Professor John Ashton, President of the Faculty of Public Health said: "FPH is dismayed and disappointed by the government's decision not to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol and its inaction on standardised packaging for tobacco, despite the clear evidence demonstrating the public health gains these measures would bring.

"Many FPH members will conclude that the government's policies are putting the interests of industry ahead of improving people's health. It is the primary duty of government to protect their citizens against external threats over which they have little or no control, such as promoting tobacco to children and teenagers.

"These decisions lead us to conclude that the only available way left for the government to shape public health policy is through the responsibility deals, which FPH has been part of. Despite continued lobbying for effective monitoring and evaluation, there is no evidence that the 'softly softly' approach of engaging with industry rather than using legislation to improve people's health has been more effective or quicker. This was the stated aim of setting up the responsibility deals two years ago, and in our view, it has not been achieved.

"That's why FPH has decided it can no longer be part of the responsibility deals, because we believe there are more effective ways for our expert members to influence policy and improve health. We remain committed to working constructively with government and other relevant organisations wherever we can to protect and improve everyone's health."

On the reasons why FPH supports a minimum unit price for alcohol, Professor Ashton said:

"A minimum unit price for alcohol would help protect the most vulnerable people in society from the harms it causes. A minimum unit price would not affect a moderate drinker on a low income. In fact, it would help reduce the multi-million pound costs to society and the public purse of dealing with drinking. Those costs include policing our high streets each weekend and the more than a million alcohol-related admissions to hospital visits each year.

"Of course, we are each responsible for how much we may or may not drink. But sometimes the state has to step in to protect people, as various governments of every political persuasion have done in the past when they introduced compulsory seat belts or banned smoking in public places. That's why we need bold action from the government now to protect everyone's health."

- This decision was reported by the Observer newspaper on Sunday 15 July 2013.