



**Federal and State Affairs Committee
Hearing on HR 6026
April 26, 2012**

Board of Directors

Jo Clepper, RN, BSN, MHA, CCRN

John Fales, DDS

Karen Finstad
Delta Dental of KS Foundation

Ron Gaches, JD
KS Dental Hygienists' Assn.

Catherine Gray
Child Care Aware of KS

Schaunta James-Boyd
EC Tyree

Bill Hammond
USD 443

Kathy Hunt
KS Head Start Association
KS Cavity Free Kids

Jose Lopez, DDS

Heidi Lowry
Rawlins County Dental Clinic

Jill Quigley, RN

Kevin Robertson, MPA, CAE
KS Dental Assn.

Becky Smith, DDS
UMKC School of Dentistry

Douglas Stuckey
Community Health Center of SEK

Marlou Wegener
Blue Cross and
Blue Shield of KS

Chairman Brunk and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HR 6026. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas. We are the statewide advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the importance of lifelong dental health by shaping policy and educating the public so Kansans know that all mouths matter. We achieve our mission through advocacy, public awareness, and education. Oral Health Kansas has over 1,100 supporters, including dentists, dental hygienists, educators, safety net clinics, charitable foundations, and advocates for children, people with disabilities and older Kansans.

Tobacco Harm Reduction

HR 6026 proposes that our state study the effectiveness of encouraging people to quit smoking by taking up smokeless tobacco. Part of the resolution discusses the need to present accurate information regarding the relative risk of disease and death from the use of smokeless tobacco products. We believe it is important to recognize that smokeless tobacco is dangerous and can result in high levels of addiction, as well as oral cancer.

Generally smokeless tobacco users keep tobacco in their mouths for several hours at a time. Keeping tobacco in the mouth for just thirty minutes is equivalent to smoking four cigarettes. The chemicals used in smokeless tobacco are highly addictive, and every time the tobacco is used, the body adjusts to the amount of tobacco that is needed. This means people need a little more tobacco all the time to fulfill the addictive craving.

Smokeless Tobacco Can Cause Cancer

The U.S. Surgeon General issued a statement in 1986 saying that smokeless tobacco "is not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes. It can cause cancer."¹

Only three percent of American adults use smokeless tobacco. Yet they have the same risk of gum disease, heart disease and addiction as smokers. They also have an even greater risk of oral cancer. People who contract oral cancer run a 27% risk of death from the disease.¹ Only slightly more than half of people newly diagnosed with oral cancer this year will be alive in five years.² According to the MD Anderson Cancer Center most people who are diagnosed with oral cancer are tobacco users.

Oral Cancer Death in Our Family

A death from oral cancer has touched the Oral Health Kansas family. We contract with several people to help provide oral health education across the state. One of our contractors lost his 32-year-old son-in-law to oral cancer. His son-in-law began chewing tobacco at age 9 and was diagnosed with oral cancer in his mid-twenties. He underwent radiation treatment and surgery and was disfigured to the point where he could no longer eat. **Even with the treatment he received, he died not long after being diagnosed with the cancer caused by his use of smokeless tobacco.** The contract educator a powerful advocate for oral health.

House Federal & State Affairs

Date: 4-26-12

10

Attachment #

Effects of Smokeless Tobacco

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, the most common users of smokeless tobacco are young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.¹

"Spit tobacco has ruined my life. Every time I turn around, they are putting me in the hospital either to have surgery or some kind of treatment. If I had known then what I know now, I never would have put a dip in my mouth. Spit tobacco seemed harmless, but in reality it was more than I could handle," says Gruen Von Behrens. **Gruen Von Behrens** is a 25-year-old oral cancer survivor who has endured almost 30 painful and disfiguring surgeries to save his life,



including one radical surgery that removed half his neck muscles, lymph nodes and 1/3 of his tongue. Like too many teenagers, Gruen first tried spit tobacco at age 13 to "fit in." Growing up in a rural farming community, spit tobacco use was too often the norm. What began as an effort to be "cool" during a camping trip with friends, resulted in a powerful addiction that affected his life in a way he never imagined. By age 17, he was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma, a common form of oral cancer. Where do kids get this idea? Macho, rugged and carefully-crafted tobacco advertisements have played a large role in spit tobacco use among minors. The tobacco industry touts its spit tobacco products as a "safer alternative to cigarettes," but Gruen will be the first to tell you that just isn't so.⁴

Cost of Oral Cancer

The Oral Cancer Center estimates \$3.2 billion is spent each year across the country to treat oral cancer.² We do not have a safety net for dental services for adults in Kansas, because there is no coverage for dental services in the Kansas Medicaid program. As Lt. Governor Colyer has pointed out during the transition to KanCare, the Kansas Medicaid program costs are growing. Preventing Kansans from acquiring oral cancer can only help keep the Medicaid costs down.

We oppose HR 6026 because smokeless tobacco presents significant dangers and should not be promoted as a safer alternative to smoking cigarettes. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

¹ American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
<http://www.entnet.org/HealthInformation/Smokeless-Tobacco.cfm>

² Oral Cancer Foundation <http://oralcancerfoundation.org/facts/>

³ MD Anderson Cancer Center <http://www.mdanderson.org/patient-and-cancer-information/cancer-information/cancer-types/oral-cancer/prevention/index.html>

⁴ Oral Health America <http://oralhealthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/Gruen-Von-Behrens.pdf>