M1 - Cardiovascular / Respiratory, Fall 2007

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http://hdl.handle.net/2027.42/64958
THE ROLE OF LITIGATION IN FORMING PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY: TOBACCO

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28 November 2007
PRESENTATION OUTLINE

• Policy context
• Role of litigation
• Tobacco control policy and litigation
• Applicability to other public health issues
• Conclusion
POLICY CONTEXT

The issues

• Role of litigation
  – Relative to political process in forming public health policy
  – Relative to other available public health remedies

• Unprecedented scope and objectives of current tobacco and gun control litigation
POLICY CONTEXT (cont.)

Policy context
• Regulatory failure
• Role of local health agencies relative to state agencies
  – Tobacco litigation mostly initiated at state level
  – Gun control litigation mostly initiated at local level
• Litigation as political issue and as shaping public health policy
THE LITIGATION ENVIRONMENT

Functions of litigation
• Compensation
• Deterrence
• Accountability
• Equity
• Corrective functions vs. promoting social goals
TOBACCO LITIGATION

Three Waves

• First two waves based on negligence and strict liability
  – No damages paid
  – Individual responsibility defense
• Third wave more expansive
  – State Attorneys General Medicaid litigation
  – Public health policy goals more explicit
    4 Evolved from damages to public health
    4 State settlements somewhat erode public health focus
FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

Rosenberg model
• Dynamic view
• Constrained view

Comparative institutional analysis
• Political processes
• The market
• The courts

Rule-shifting vs. culture-shifting effects
Tobacco Control Policies

**Economic**
- Excise Taxes
- Damage awards from litigation

**Regulatory/Legislative**
- Youth access restrictions
- Restrictions on smoking
- Advertising restrictions
- Marketing curbs (i.e., on logos and sporting event scholarship)
- Enforcement activities
Tobacco Control Policies (cont.)

Information/Education
- Education about the harms from tobacco products
- Disclosure of tobacco industry documents
- Settlement negotiations with the tobacco industry
- Shifting the public health debate
- Smoking cessation programs
- Research in tobacco control policy or in tobacco-related diseases
- Counter advertising (i.e., anti-smoking ads)
Role of Litigation in Changing Tobacco Policy

Exclusive domain
- Damage awards

Direct effects
- Corrective measures shared with legislatures
Role of Litigation in Changing Tobacco Policy (cont.)

Indirect effects

- Disclosure of incriminating documents
- Educational function
- Stimulate other policymakers to act
- Influence changes in industry behavior
### ROLE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN CHANGING TOBACCO POLICY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Indirect</th>
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<tr>
<td>Every policy instrumentality</td>
<td>Stimulate negotiations with the industry</td>
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<td>except damages</td>
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ARGUMENTS FAVORING JUDICIAL POLICYMAKING

Pragmatic

- Legislative/regulatory failure
- Damage awards forcing large price increases
- Motivating public support through disclosing documents
- Forcing tobacco industry to negotiate
ARGUMENTS FAVORING JUDICIAL POLICYMAKING (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophical</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Courts are inherently policymakers</td>
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<td>• Blurring of the lines between the political and judicial processes</td>
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OBJECTIONS TO JUDICIAL POLICYMAKING

Philosophical

• Separation of powers
• Legitimacy of courts as policymakers
• Procedural constraints limit ability of judges to evaluate policy alternatives
OBSESSIONS TO JUDICIAL POLICYMAKING (cont.)

Pragmatic

- Novel legal theories being tested
- Courts might not get it “right”
- Diverts resources from other policy efforts
- Reliance on litigation as a solution
ROLE OF THE COURTS
IN PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

Institutional choice

- Preconditions to litigation
  - Building the moral and political case
  - Not necessarily present in other public health battles

- Litigation as second-best solution
  - Distinct role in more comprehensive strategy
  - Concern about over-reliance on litigation
Individual choice and responsibility

• Balance between industry culpability and individual freedom
• Tobacco as extreme case
• Applicability to other public health issues
Applicability to Other Public Health Issues

• Obesity
• Gun control
• Gambling addiction
• Differences?
• Similarities?
CONCLUSION

• Complex interactions between political theory and pragmatic policymaking realities.

• Blurring of the line between litigation and politics of public health
  – Opponents must confront legislative/regulatory failure
  – Proponents must recognize possibility that litigation will not change policy.
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<th>QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION</th>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Which issues are amendable to litigation? Tobacco? Alcohol? Guns? Obesity?</td>
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<td>(2) What is achievable through litigation that cannot be obtained from other public health approaches?</td>
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<td>(3) From your perspective, what are the costs and benefits from pursuing litigation as a policy strategy?</td>
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