

Local pharmacists have mixed views on new cigarette sales legislation

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

As of Jan. 1, pharmacies in Ontario are no longer allowed to sell cigarettes and local pharmacists are giving the legislation mixed reviews.

Cigarettes were taken off the shelves at Shoppers Drug Mart in Georgetown Marketplace Mall on Saturday, Dec. 31 at the end of the day and other items were put up in the empty space left behind.

Owner Al Fraser said about 10 per cent of his business was cigarette sales and the new legislation will take a big bite out of his total sales.

"Yes, I am concerned about it," he said.

While grocery stores can continue to sell cigarettes, any store with a pharmacy, including Wal-Mart and Zellers, can no longer sell cigarettes. Cigarette machines are also illegal as of January 1.

Some pharmacies, mostly independent ones and smaller chains, are getting around the legislation by setting up a separate area with a separate entrance, but Fraser opted not to do this, because it would be costly, he said. He is waiting the outcome of a court challenge of the law which will take place in February.

Fraser said the NDP government came up with the legislation in April or May, but didn't declare it until November even though it would take effect January 1. This didn't allow time for a court challenge before the legislation came

into effect, and that concerns him. Even though the owner of Acton Pharmacy, Bill Yundt, thinks the legislation is a good idea, he sold cigarettes up until the New Year. He said he sold cigarettes for the convenience of his elderly customers, so that they wouldn't have to make a stop at another store, but this didn't account for much of his business.

"It's not much of a cut in our sales. If we sold 30 or 40 packs a week, it was a lot," Yundt said. "People are not going to stop smoking because of this legislation. They're going to other places for their cigarettes."

Neil Young took cigarettes off of the shelves in Young's Pharmacy in downtown Georgetown four years ago and this had a substantial impact on his sales. He said this was a moral decision and he fully supports the new legislation.

"I encourage and applaud it," he said. "I think the pharmacists resisting it are doing themselves a big disservice."

He said he decided not to sell cigarettes because there was a lot of discussion in the profession at that time as to whether pharmacies should sell something which is proven to have a negative impact on people's health.

"A lot of pharmacies claim if they can't sell cigarettes, they can't continue in business. Those that are complaining are using cigarette sales to supplement professional fees," he said.



Shelves which used to hold cigarettes were empty behind cashier Joy Harding at Shoppers Drug Mart early last week.

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