

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

In today's environment, tobacco science is more important than ever. The industry should continue to support it.

By George Gay

There is an old proverb that says, “Stinginess does not enrich; charity does not impoverish.” Indeed, you can go further than this and say that stinginess impoverishes and charity enriches.

Charity comes in different guises, but here I want to talk about charity as investment: particularly investment in an enriched future for the tobacco industry; investment in Coresta. It is my belief that the tobacco industry—however that might come to be configured—can have an enriched future, but only by changing out of all recognition, and that will take investment, part of which has to be in science.

I'm in a bit of a predicament, though. At the moment, all I can write about is stinginess. The 2012 Coresta Congress, uniquely in my experience, ended in September without a venue or host being named for what should be the 2014 Congress. OK, let me admit that I didn't attend the 2012 Congress, and I'm not sure that the failure to give details of the next one is down to stinginess, but I have £10 here that says it is (I hope that doesn't sound too stingy).

What is happening here? Doesn't the tobacco industry make enough money to fund a congress every two years for its scientists, with two study-group meetings thrown in during the intervening years? It seems not. If I look on the Coresta website, I see also that there's no mention of the next joint meeting of the agronomy and phytopathology study groups. And the next joint smoke science and product technology group meeting is to be held in Seville,

Spain, Sept. 29-Oct. 3, 2013. I take it that will be more than a year since the previous one. Is it possible to keep up with advances in technology based on a schedule that seems more suited to meetings of the pigeon fanciers' society?

Fifty years ago, the tobacco industry seemed to be able to afford a full schedule of meetings, but, of course, that was when it was less “efficient” than it is now.

One of the excuses you hear when the subject of funding Coresta meetings is brought up is that the burden of funding these events falls on just a few corporate shoulders. But I have to say this argument has never reduced me to tears. The tobacco multinationals cannot vacuum up all of the small- and medium-sized private companies and monopolies around the world and then complain that there aren't enough companies to share the burden of hosting events like Coresta congresses. That is like the man who kills his parents and then asks the court for leniency because he's now an orphan.

What is wrong with buying up fewer shares and then lashing out a few dollars on a congress? And anyway, it's not necessarily the case that just one company has to host an event. What is wrong with two, three or even 10 doing so, each contributing according to their turnover?


Of course, some people will complain that what is written above isn't fair, and they would have a point. British American Tobacco has probably done considerably more than its fair share recently to keep Coresta going through the sorts of minefields that will always have to be negotiated by an organization composed of members who compete in the marketplace. ►

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And Japan Tobacco hosted at Sapporo, Japan, on Sept. 23-28 the 2012 Coresta Congress with what I am told was perfect organization in a venue that was practical and that provided facilities for every need. At the same time it hosted a fascinating accompanying-persons program that provided an introduction to kimono wearing, ikebana (flower arrangement), calligraphy and tea ceremony. It was unfortunate that a row between Japan and China over a group of islands (known by different names in Japan, China and Taiwan) meant Chinese participants felt, for whatever reason, they were unable to attend the Congress. Their absence left some significant holes in the program, but that was no fault of the organizers.

Additionally, other major companies have contributed considerably to Coresta in the past, and there are a number of supplier companies that have punched well above their weight over the years when it has come to providing people to serve on the various study groups, subgroups and task forces.

Worth supporting

Nevertheless, I cannot help thinking it is a sad state of affairs when an industry as well off as the tobacco industry cannot come up with a host for a prestigious event such as the Coresta Congress. It's not as if such a congress isn't in the industry's best interests. As I wrote above, it is my belief that the industry can have an enriched future, but only if it is willing to change, and only then if it takes control of that change, insofar as it is allowed to do so.

I should point out that I believe strongly that Coresta is worth supporting even though I don't go along with the oft-expressed view—in my experience mainly expressed by scientists—that scientists should be in the vanguard of those taking the tobacco industry into its brave new world. To my mind, it will be the creative marketing people who will show the way by coming up with new types of products they think are less risky, while scientists will make the risk assessments.

Indeed, I'm cleverly predicting something that has happened and is happening. Electronic cigarettes, which many people believe are, so far, the best product that has been devised for weaning smokers around the world from traditional cigarettes, have been available for years. And yet, as far as I'm aware, it was only at the 2012 Congress that a meeting was held at which Coresta decided it should look into these products.

Interestingly, Filtrona Scientific Services' (FSS) director of scientific development, Dr. Mike Taylor, presented what, as far as I could glean by running my eye over the 2012 Congress program, was the only paper on electronic cigarettes: *The effect of puff duration and volume on the yields of e-cigarettes*. This was the second of a two-part presentation on the company's electronic cigarette research, the first of which was given at the 66th Tobacco Science Research Conference held in Concord, North Carolina, USA, on Sept. 9-12 by Tony McCormack, senior manager for intellectual property at the Filtrona

Technology Centre. I don't want to dwell on this research because FSS has made it available at www.filtronascentificservices.com/researchpapers. But FSS should be commended for this study, which, on the face of it, is into a product whose success in its current form would not be in the best interests of its sister company, Filtrona Filter Products. This seems to be research in what I would describe as the true tradition of good science by a company that claims to operate independently, and clearly does.

Mumbo-jumbo

So why is this research so important? Well, it helps to increase the knowledge we have about a product that has the potential to wean smokers off traditional cigarettes, which, we are told, lead to the premature deaths of 6 million people every year. I know I keep repeating that figure, but it is stuck in my head. And I know people could argue with much justification that repeating it doesn't make it right. But even if we accept that the real figure is only 10 percent of that, we have to do something.

And one of the problems is that if the tobacco industry or the electronic cigarette industry does not do such research, a vacuum will be left that will be filled with mumbo-jumbo, perhaps leading to electronic cigarette bans or regulations counterproductive in respect of positive health outcomes.

Just prior to writing this story, I came across a piece on the website of the U.K.'s National Health Service (NHS), titled, rather oddly, *E-cigarettes 'may damage lungs,'* and with a first paragraph that reads, "Electronic cigarettes could "damage your lungs" as they cause less oxygen to be absorbed by the blood," reports the *Daily Mail*."

The *Daily Mail* is an extremely popular newspaper, but even so, it wouldn't be my first port of call for advice on health issues. So I was surprised to see the NHS using the story to pass on information on what is an extremely important subject—given the 6 million, etc., etc.

The NHS piece went on to say, in part, that the current research press release suggested the study added weight to what it described as the growing evidence of the harmful effects of electronic cigarettes. "There are far more well-established methods that can help you quit smoking, such as nicotine patches, gum and inhalers (collectively known as nicotine replacement therapy or NRT)," it said.

In fairness to the NHS, I should say that what I have written above is highly selective, and that its piece does talk about this being the preliminary findings of a small study investigating the short-term effects of smoking an e-cigarette. And it is at some pains to point out what can and cannot be taken from such findings.

But some of the important qualifications, such as the fact that the source of the research funding was not dis-



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direct or indirect links to the tobacco industry and to ensure the scientific integrity and independence of the society.” And just in case we were thinking of going next door, the journal said it hoped the new ERS policy “can serve as an inspiration to other medical societies seeking to prevent, as much as possible, the tobacco industry’s continued attempts to manipulate science, researchers and public health policy.”

This is somewhat depressing because the word has to be spread about electronic cigarettes and other truly low-risk cigarette substitutes. The 2012 Congress had a lot of interesting papers on work being done to better understand traditional

But when will the next one be?

closed, are a little way down the piece and, to my mind, the heading and tone of the piece leaves you in no doubt that you shouldn’t mess with electronic cigarettes.

And this is probably the exact opposite of what the NHS should be telling smokers. This is possibly the one product that they should be messing with.

Up to a point, I’m not sure that this matters a great deal. I have a feeling that a lot of smokers know instinctively what the NHS will wake up to some years down the line. But nevertheless I think the tobacco industry has a duty to try to research the electronic cigarette issue properly and deliver the results to whoever will listen. And this is where Coresta comes in and why it is important that this body is properly supported. There is a chance that Coresta can bring some weight to bear, especially in the case of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, which is reasonably open and knows good research when it sees it. Coresta, especially through its recommended methods, has a voice that has to be heard at times.

Uphill battle

Unfortunately, despite the best intentions of BAT and, probably, other tobacco companies, getting tobacco-company research accepted is still a long, hard road. At the beginning of October, I came across a story in the *European Respiratory Journal*, just the sort of publication I would have thought might be useful to approach with some good research on electronic cigarettes. Unfortunately, the piece was headlined: “Towards a total ban on links with the tobacco industry: new rules for the ERS.” The piece went on to describe how the European Respiratory Society (ERS) has developed “new, clear and stringent rules to counteract the threat posed by real or perceived,

al cigarettes and how to make them less risky, but we have to face the fact that time has been called on this product.

In a long story in the *Ottawa Citizen* on Oct. 5, the paper looked in part at some of the efforts that had been made and that were continuing to be made to develop, manufacture and market tobacco products that were less risky than traditional cigarettes. But the last word on traditional cigarettes went to Mitch Zeller, a former associate commissioner of the FDA. “At the end of the day, you’re still burning tobacco leaves and inhaling the smoke into your lungs,” he was quoted as saying. “These products [cigarettes with reduced toxicants] might make the difference between falling out of a 14-storey window and a 10-storey window.”

I think that at this point in history, it is difficult to dispute what Zeller has to say.

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The Coresta president is Dr. Martin Ward (BAT), and the vice president is Dr. Michael Ogden (RJR).

This is the composition of the Coresta board.

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