

Doctors split on Bishop tobacco truce

By medical writer STEVE DOW

THE Australian Medical Association yesterday called a truce with the Opposition spokeswoman on health, Ms Bronwyn Bishop, but was itself accused of going soft on tobacco advertising after making a deal with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Downer.

The president of the nation's peak medical body, Dr Brendan Nelson, said that while the AMA would not be able to support Ms Bishop if she restated her personal views favouring tobacco advertising, he could not support a call by the Doctors Reform Society for her resignation.

Dr Nelson said he accepted guarantees given to him by Mr Downer in a phone call that Ms Bishop would enthusiastically promote the Coalition's policy in support of prohibiting tobacco advertising. "It was not helpful" to repeat all the details of their conversation.

"All I can say is that, if we leave the tobacco thing out of it, (Ms Bishop) seems to be extremely enthusiastic about having the health portfolio and I can only assume she's doing her best to get abreast of the issues," he said.

But the president of the Doctors Reform Society, Dr Con Costa, said the AMA "appeared to have weakened its opposition to Mrs Bishop after Mr Downer's phone call, in which the Leader of the Opposition allegedly offered the AMA more incentives for private insurance".

He said if Ms Bishop did not make a statement that smoking was injurious to health and that tobacco advertising or sponsorship was not acceptable in any form, the society would collect petitions in doctors' surgeries to have her sacked.

But Dr Nelson said if the campaign against Ms Bishop went ahead in surgeries of members of the society, "I don't think it'll be getting very far".

Dr Costa said Ms Bishop had cancelled an appearance on the Nine Network's Sunday program yesterday to avoid being questioned on tobacco advertising.

Ms Bishop said yesterday she would not comment on "calls by Labor Party front organisations".

She said she cancelled her appearance on the Sunday program the previous day "because I simply decided I wasn't going to do it. Nobody gagged me".

Having given private assurances to Mr Downer she would not contradict Coalition policy again, Ms Bishop refused to restate her personal views on tobacco advertising yesterday.

She said there would be no change in Coalition policy supporting the tobacco advertising ban.

Liberal deputy leader Mr Peter Costello said yesterday the issue of Ms Bishop and tobacco advertising "wasn't even a one-day wonder. That was a one-hour wonder".

Meanwhile, with World Tobacco Day being held tomorrow,



row, the AMA released a "tobacco scoreboard" ranking Western Australia as having the best record of any State or Territory government on discouraging smoking and the Northern Territory the worst. The ACT Legislative Assembly won a "commitment" award for its legislation banning smoking in enclosed public places. Dr Nelson said there was still a long way to go in areas such as mandatory school education, in which every State and Territory scored zero. "It's interesting that despite having just under 400,000 children in this country under the age of 14 now who will die because they will smoke, we still can't get mandatory education in schools," Dr Nelson said.

AMA SCOREBOARD							
CATEGORIES	Vic	NSW	WA	SA	Qld	Tas	ACT NT
Advertising restrictions	10	10	10	10	0	0	10 0
Controls on sales to minors	4	4	8	4	2	2	4 4
Health warnings	6	6	6	6	6	6	6 6
Tobacco taxation	4	4	8	8	4	8	4 6
Public education	6	6	6	6	4	4	6 0
Mandatory school education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 0
Smoke-free workplaces	6	6	4	6	4	2	6 2
Restrictions in public places	2	2	2	2	0	0	2 0
Health Promotion Foundations	10	0	10	10	0	5	10 0
Commitment of Government	6	7	8	8	7	4	9 3
TOTAL	54	45	62	60	27	31	57 21

Scores compiled by Australian Council on Smoking and Health except for Commitment of Government - compiled by AMA State branches

● Dr Nelson ... 'we still can't get mandatory education in schools' — Picture: WARREN KIRBY