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Smokers Outside Hoboken CVS Unfazed by Company's New 'No Cigarettes' Policy

Terrence McDonald, The Jersey Journal
February 5, 2014

HOBOKEN – CVS dropped a bombshell today when it announced it wouldn't sell cigarettes at any of its locations nationwide starting Oct. 1, saying the move is part of its effort to transform from a drugstore to a health care provider.

The reaction outside the Washington Street CVS in Hoboken? Meh.

Sisters Mary Jane and Pat Murphy, of Jersey City and Bayonne, respectively, were visiting the Mile Square City for a doctor's appointment. Mary Jane smokes Marlboros, Pat smokes Newport 100s. Neither of them cared about CVS' decision.

"It don't matter," Mary Jane said. "I'll just get them somewhere else."

Lorraine Nieves, 27, of Jersey City, was also unfazed.

"I think it's a good thing," said Nieves, who quit smoking about six months ago.

Smoking is "not good for kids," she said, adding that she "sometimes" misses her Newports.

CVS Caremark one of the nation's two largest drugstore chains, with over 7,600 locations. Larry J. Merlo, the company's CEO and president, said in a statement that selling tobacco products is "inconsistent with our purpose."

"As the delivery of health care evolves with an emphasis on better health outcomes, reducing chronic disease and controlling costs, CVS Caremark is playing an expanded role in providing care through our pharmacists and nurse practitioners," Merlo said.

The company said it earns \$2 billion revenue annually from selling cigarettes and other tobacco products. Its overall annual revenue is \$123 billion.

CVS' move is a blow to the tobacco industry, which has seen a dramatic dip in sales in recent years. U.S. cigarette sales fell 31.3 percent between 2003 and 2013.

Summit-based nonprofit Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP) is

cheering the news. Karen Blumenfeld, its executive director, told The Jersey Journal that it hopes CVS' decision will encourage other national and regional chain stores to halt selling cigarettes as well.

Blumenfeld said 70 percent of all smokers want to quit. And now those who shop at CVS can eliminate some temptation.

"They won't be visually greeted with tobacco," she said. "It makes it easier for them."

About 15 percent of New Jersey residents smoke, and nationwide the figure is roughly 20 percent, according to Blumenfeld.

One person who isn't happy is the 60-year-old New York City man who was leaving the CVS today with a carton of L&M cigarettes. The man, who didn't want to be identified, said he travels into New Jersey for the sole purpose of buying cigarettes.

Packs of L&M are \$10.17 in New York and only \$6.60 in Hoboken, he said.

"This is bad news," he said.

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