Beat: Health

CVS becomes first major U.S. drug chain to drop tobacco

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USPA News - CVS Caremark on Wednesday announced it plans to stop selling all tobacco products at its more than 7,600 stores nationwide, making it the first major drug chain in the United States to do so. "Ending the sale of cigarettes and tobacco products at CVS/pharmacy is the right thing for us to do for our customers and our company to help people on their path to better health," said Larry Merlo, President and CEO of CVS Caremark.

"Put simply, the sale of tobacco products is inconsistent with our purpose." By ending the sale of tobacco products at all CVS stores, the company hopes to decrease the more than 480,000 deaths each year in the United States alone that are attributed to diseases caused by cigarette use. "CVS Caremark is continually looking for ways to promote health and reduce the burden of disease," said CVS Caremark Chief Medical Officer Troyen Brennan. "Stopping the sale of cigarettes and tobacco will make a significant difference in reducing the chronic illnesses associated with tobacco use." Although described as a positive move for healthcare, the decision is expected to leave a dramatic dent in CVS Corporation`s annual revenue. The company estimates the loss of revenue to be $2 billion, or 6 to 9 cents of profit per share in the next year. But a statement released by the company on Wednesday maintained that it made the decision to more closely align itself with patients, clients, and healthcare providers to improve better health outcomes. It plans to drop the tobacco products starting October 1. "Every day, all across the country, customers and patients place their trust in our 26,000 pharmacists and nurse practitioners to serve their health care needs," commented CVS/pharmacy President Helena Foulkes. "Removing tobacco products from our stores is an important step in helping Americans to quit smoking and get healthy." As part of the changes, CVS will launch a nationwide program this spring to encourage Americans to stop smoking. It will be available at all CVS/pharmacy and MinuteClinic locations, offering online resources as well as treatment and information on how to stop smoking. ?As a leader of the health care community focused on improving health outcomes, we are pledging to help millions of Americans quit smoking," said Merlo. "In addition to removing cigarettes and tobacco products for sale, we will undertake a robust national smoking cessation program." U.S. President Barack Obama, who quit smoking himself and spoke passionately about his plans to improve healthcare in the United States during his State of the Union Address last month, congratulated CVS for helping Americans to take steps in that direction. "I applaud this morning`s news that CVS Caremark has decided to stop selling cigarettes and other tobacco products in its stores, and begin a national campaign to help millions of Americans quit smoking instead," Obama said. "As one of the largest retailers and pharmacies in America, CVS Caremark sets a powerful example, and today`s decision will help advance my Administration`s efforts to reduce tobacco-related deaths, cancer, and heart disease, as well as bring down health care costs ? ultimately saving lives and protecting untold numbers of families from pain and heartbreak for years to come."

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