

# It's Time to Move Past Smoke Free Rooms: A Proposal for Standard Hypoallergenic Hotel Rooms

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## Short Communication

In 1964 the Surgeon General released the landmark Report on Smoking and Health [1]. The report and subsequent studies linked tobacco with a multitude of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, including cancer, COPD, asthma and heart disease. Dramatic changes took place on every level of society, profoundly effecting the hospitality industry. In the US and Canada, the demands of anti-tobacco forces were at first ridiculed, then awkwardly placated, eventually becoming an expected standard. Since the publication of the 1964 report smoking rates decreased from 43% to 18% of adults [2].

In 2006 the Surgeon General Report on Second Hand Smoke [3] prompted Westin Hotels to announce a chain wide, 100% smoke free hotel policy. This was soon followed by Marriott and all its brands. Soon followed by other brands in the United States and Canada. These policies were implemented voluntarily. Continuing pressure led to five states (as of 4/14/2014); Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wisconsin and nearly 100 municipalities to mandate that hotels be 100% smoke free [4]. Although many countries have smoking bans extending to all indoor public places, including restaurants, workplaces and public transport, hotels are generally not subject to such laws with the exception of Bermuda.

Allergies are major cause of illness in the industrialized world, with 10 to 20% of the population suffering from symptoms induced by respiratory allergy with children and young adults making up a very significant fraction of those affected. As opposed to falling smoking rates, allergy and asthma prevalence is increasing. Asthma now affects between 5 and 10 percent of the population [5,6] with allergy being the most common exacerbating factor. Asthma and allergic diseases are some of the most common reasons for visits to health care providers and emergency rooms, resulting in significant direct and indirect costs [7]. In addition to the economic burden, asthma and allergic diseases significantly impact the quality of life of sufferers [8].

Proper diagnosis of asthma and allergy consists of a thorough history and exam, including lung function and allergy testing [9]. Management typically involves multiple modalities, including environmental modification, pharmacotherapy, immunotherapy and patient education [9]. Good management reduces symptoms, the incidence of co-morbid conditions (such as otitis, and sinusitis), the probability of emergency room visits, hospitalizations and significantly improves the quality of life of patients. Well controlled allergy and asthma patients have normal or near normal functioning without any limitations on activity [9].

Reducing the medication load while maintaining optimal function is one of the goals of modern allergy and asthma management. Less medication reduces adverse effects and improves patient satisfaction. A reduced total allergen load allows for a reduction in medication

without an increase in symptoms [10]. Effective environmental modification can be implemented as a result of an allergy evaluation performed by an experienced specialist.

Exposing patients to an unexpected increase in allergen load can tip the therapeutic balance. Travel can commonly lead to such an event, resulting in potentially unpleasant or even grave consequences.

The availability of suitably modified, hypoallergenic hotel rooms provides allergic travelers with a healthy environment. Hotels reduce total room aeroallergen loads by reducing the concentrations of pollen, animal dander, mold spores and dust mites. Fragrance free, hypoallergenic bath and body products do the same for the skin of sensitive travelers.

While it is not reasonable to expect all room allergen levels to be reduced to 0%, simple measures can result in hypoallergenic rooms able to maintain the well-being of the majority of allergic travelers and offer a safe environment during particularly high pollen/mold spore days.

The negative effects of tobacco smoke exposure are well known. To the non-smoker, the smell of stale tobacco smoke is immediately apparent and can prompt the traveler to seek another room. Other

