

Summary of NCSCT - Electronic Cigarettes: A Briefing for Stop Smoking Services

What Are E-Cigarettes?

E-cigarettes are devices that deliver nicotine within an inhalable aerosol by heating a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol and/or glycerol, plus flavours. This aerosol is commonly referred to as vapour and so the use of an e-cigarette is described as vaping. Unlike cigarettes, there is no combustion (burning) involved in e-cigarettes so there is no smoke and no other harmful products of combustion, such as tar and carbon monoxide.

E-Cigarette Friendly Stop Smoking Services:

An e-cigarette friendly stop smoking service supports clients who want to use an e-cigarette to help them quit smoking and reaches out to smokers considering using an e-cigarette to come to the service for behavioural support. This may present a dilemma for practitioners who feel uncomfortable with this concept, or who feel they lack knowledge about e-cigarettes.

These tips may help:

- Don't be anxious about not being an expert. It is unlikely that you will know, or be expected to know, everything about e-cigarettes – but what you do know is how to help people stop smoking. It may be that your service users will use NRT along with e-cigarettes; this can increase the likelihood of successful quitting.
- Familiarise yourself with e-cigarettes. Talk to experienced vapers, visit a reputable retailer and read posts on forums.
- Be positive when speaking about e-cigarettes. When you say: "We can't recommend e-cigarettes", people hear: "E-cigarettes are no good". Instead choose words that convey a positive message such as: "We can't supply them, but we can certainly offer the extra support that will help you stop smoking if you buy your own e-cigarette".
- Don't push people to come off their e-cigarette. Some practitioners feel it is important to get people off nicotine as soon as possible, but in fact longer-term e-cigarette use can be a protective factor against relapse back to smoking.
- Don't be alarmed about recreational nicotine. This is a choice some people make, and it is not the business of stop smoking services to make judgements about this. We are not a 'stop nicotine service' and if we think getting people off their e-cigarette is a good use of our time, we are ignoring a far more important opportunity to help people quit and to stay off cigarettes. Be open to their choices, and listen to them, especially when they say that they are doing really well with their e-cigarette.
- Look forward to hearing people celebrate their success, and telling you that using an e-cigarette and receiving support was a revelation.

Recommendations for Practice:

1. Be open to e-cigarette use in people keen to try them; especially in those who have tried and failed to stop smoking using licensed stop smoking medicines.

2. Provide advice on e-cigarettes that includes:

- E-cigarettes provide nicotine in a form that is much safer than smoking.
- Some people find e-cigarettes helpful for quitting, cutting down their nicotine intake and/or managing temporary abstinence.
- There is a wide range of e-cigarettes and people may need to try various types, flavours and nicotine dosages before they find a product that they like.
- E-cigarette use is not like smoking and people may need to experiment and learn to use them effectively (e.g. longer 'drags' may be required and a number of short puffs may be needed initially to activate the vapouriser and improve nicotine delivery). They may also need to recognise when atomisers need replacing.
- People previously using e-cigarettes while smoking (e.g. to reduce the number of cigarettes that they smoke) may need to consider changing devices and/or nicotine concentrations when making a quit attempt.

- Although some health risks from e-cigarette use may yet emerge, these are likely, at worst, to be a small fraction of the risks of smoking. This is because e-cigarette vapour does not contain the products of combustion (burning) that cause lung and heart disease, and cancer.

3. Multi-session behavioural support provided by trained stop smoking practitioners will improve the chances of successfully stopping smoking whether or not people use e-cigarettes. It may be useful to encourage clients to familiarise themselves with the use of their e-cigarette before setting a quit date.

4. Stop smoking services can provide behavioural support to clients who are using e-cigarettes and can include this in their national data returns.

5. Clients of stop smoking services who are using an e-cigarette and who also want to use NRT can safely use the two in conjunction. They do not need to have stopped using the e-cigarette before they can use NRT.

Summary of Evidence on E-cigarettes:

- E-cigarettes are predominantly used by smokers who want to reduce the number of cigarettes that they smoke; they are also used by smokers who want an alternative for when they cannot or do not want to smoke, or by those who want to quit.
- E-cigarette technology continues to evolve and the quality of devices has improved. With experience, users can achieve blood nicotine levels similar to those achieved with smoking cigarettes.
- E-cigarettes can reduce urges to smoke and can help smokers quit and reduce cigarette consumption; although data on the effectiveness for quitting are not yet as robust as those for medicines licensed for smoking cessation.
- Taken together, data from two randomised controlled trials shows that old (and now obsolete) brands of e-cigarette were more effective than 'placebo' versions that did not deliver any nicotine. The effect size was similar to what is found with licensed nicotine products when prescribed by a health professional. A large observational study of e-cigarettes in the 'real world' found similar effectiveness to licensed stop smoking medicines obtained on prescription, and greater than licensed nicotine products bought from a shop.
- Short-term exposure to e-cigarettes appears to pose few if any risks. Mouth and throat irritation are most commonly reported symptoms and these subside over time. There are no high quality safety data from long-term e-cigarette use, but there is no good reason to expect that their use would be anywhere near as risky as smoking.
- Low levels of toxicants and carcinogens have been detected in e-cigarette liquid and vapour, but these are much lower than those found in cigarette smoke.
- The concentration of toxins in exhaled vapour is much lower than that in side-stream and exhaled cigarette smoke, and is expected to pose no measurable health risk to bystanders.
- Concurrent (dual) use of cigarettes and e-cigarettes has been associated with increased motivation to quit, and to a reduction in the number of cigarettes smoked.
- Use of e-cigarettes by never smokers remains negligible and evidence does not support the view that e-cigarettes are acting as a gateway into smoking among young people.

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