E-CIGARETTES

Why the rules should not be relaxed for e-cigarettes to encourage people to stop smoking

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The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report on e-cigarettes is well worth reading.1,2 The 98 pieces of published written evidence have been produced by a range of people and organisations, including multinational tobacco companies, vaping organisations, and public health groups.

We are concerned that the report repeats Public Health England’s claim that e-cigarettes are 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes.3 This will lead some people to think that e-cigarettes are quite safe. But we think it is far too early to devise a figure such as this when there is a lack of evidence on the long term health consequences of e-cigarettes.4

Besides safety issues, another important consideration is efficacy of e-cigarettes in helping smokers to reduce consumption or quit altogether. A recent Cochrane review found little evidence that e-cigarettes are an aid to smoking cessation and recommended that further studies are needed.5 We are therefore concerned that the select committee website states: “E-cigarettes are a proven stop smoking tool.”6

The report also ignores the evidence that e-cigarettes can act as a gateway to conventional smoking.7 We are alarmed at the rise in use of Juuls in some countries and worried that they may become a desirable lifestyle choice of young people in this country, as well as a long term serious risk to public health.8

Although we agree that smoking still “remains a national health crisis,”9 we do not think that many of the steps in the report should be actively endorsed by the government. We are surprised that unproven and potentially dangerous e-cigarettes are being promoted at a time when there have been substantial cuts to successful public health services, including smoking cessation services.10

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: https://www.bmj.com/content/362/bmj.k3571/rr.

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8 Iacobucci G. Stop smoking services: BMJ analysis shows how councils are stubbing them out. BMJ 2018;362:k3849. 10.1136/bmj.k3849
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