Tobacco Harm Reduction: Key Themes

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Declaration

• Author and Executive Editor – “No Fire, No Smoke: The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction report published by Knowledge-Action-Change. KAC promotes public health through harm reduction
• DrugWise is a UK-based drug information NGO
• Member of the UK Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs
• Member of Secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prescribed Drug Dependence
The global smoking problem

- Over 1 bn smokers globally, 80% in low and middle income countries (WHO)
- Half of all those who smoke will die prematurely from smoking-related diseases
- 70% of deaths are in low and middle-income countries

- Over six million people die from a smoking-related disease every year
- More people die from smoking cigarettes than from malaria, HIV and TB combined
- By the end of the century 1 bn people will have suffered a smoking-related disease (WHO)
The problem - combustion

Mike Russell “Smokers cannot easily stop smoking because they are addicted to nicotine.... People smoke for nicotine but they die from the tar” 1976 BMJ 1: 1430-1433

Figure from: No Fire, No Smoke: The Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction 2018 (2018). London: Knowledge-Action-Change
The tobacco harm reduction proposition

- Most smokers say they want to stop smoking
- Many have tried to stop
- Many are unable or unwilling to give up nicotine – they like it
- Smoking tobacco is the most harmful way of delivering nicotine

Providing safer ways to deliver nicotine enables people to continue using it but to avoid the health risks of smoking
HIV and Needle Exchange
HIV alone didn’t cause the clogged artery in my neck. Smoking with HIV did.

Brian, age 45, California

For free help to quit smoking, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

CDC.gov/tips
E-cigarettes around 95% less harmful than tobacco estimates landmark review

Expert independent review concludes that e-cigarettes have potential to help smokers quit.

2019

‘Our new review reinforces the finding that vaping is a fraction of the risk of smoking, at least 95% less harmful, and of negligible risk to bystanders.’

‘We should be encouraging smokers to switch.’

Published 19 August 2015
From: Public Health England


E-cig use promoted by cancer and heart foundations, and the NHS
National Health Service promotes e-cigarettes

https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree/help-and-advice/e-cigarettes

E-cigarettes / vapes

Many people find e-cigarettes – also known as vapes – helpful for stopping smoking. E-cigarettes aren’t completely risk free but they carry a small fraction of the risk of cigarettes. Quitting with an e-cigarette is particularly effective when combined with expert face-to-face support.

- What are e-cigarettes and how do they work?
- What types of e-cigarette are there?
- How do I choose the right e-cigarette for me?
- Will an e-cigarette help me stop smoking?
- How safe are e-cigarettes?
Trends in smoking (UK) and e-cigarette use (Great Britain) 2012–2019

Data sources:

VAPERS: e-cigarette users
SMOKERS: cigarette users
Sweden – due to snus, the lowest level of smoking in Europe and the lowest deaths from tobacco.
The challenge to harm reduction and the right to health

Consumers, politicians and the general public are being left confused about the relative safety of these products by:

- Flawed science usually not conducted in real world situations
- Misleading public information put out by anti-harm reduction activists
- Sensational media reporting
- Lack of leadership from organisations like the WHO

Banning these products, or subjecting them to onerous regulation or high taxation effectively deny access to potentially lifesaving products
Some key points

• People smoke for the nicotine and die from the tar
• Most smokers wish they wanted to quit
• Tobacco Harm Reduction is *complimentary* to existing tobacco control interventions. But these plus NRT and medications are not enough
• THR can be an offramp from smoking towards reduced risk and cessation.
• Just because we don’t know everything doesn’t mean we don’t know anything
• No evidence of a gateway effect to smoking
• No evidence that current concerns over vaping have anything to do with vaping regular e-liquid
• The anti-nicotine crusade will not work any more than the anti-drug crusade.
Find at www.gsthr.org

Summary document available in: Russian, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, Hindi, Polish, Indonesian, Japanese and English.

Interactive website features individual country profiles on smoking data and tobacco harm reduction status

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