


CROSSTALK

Rebuttal from Rachna Begh and Paul Aveyard

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Chung *et al.* (2020) end their piece by urging non-smokers not to vape and we concur. Where we divide is that we argued that it is reasonable to say 'If you smoke, stop, and if you cannot stop, vape'. Having read the authors' arguments, we still feel this is reasonable advice, and, because we fear few people listen to academic arguments, a reasonable basis for public health policy.

Chung and colleagues accept the evidence that e-cigarettes attract smokers and help them stop smoking, and this is important. Public health policy aims to attract as many people as possible to use cessation aids that increase the success of quit attempts, and e-cigarettes are notably more successful than prescribed medication. While most evidence suggests that e-cigarettes are about as effective as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT; Hartmann-Boyce *et al.* 2016), Hajek *et al.* (2019) showed that e-cigarettes were nearly twice as effective as NRT (risk ratio = 1.83; 95% CI = 1.30–2.58), contrary to what Chung *et al.* suggest. Nevertheless, both sides seem to accept that e-cigarettes can help smokers quit and are doing so at a greater rate in the population than any other cessation aid.

Chung and colleagues suggest that e-cigarettes lure young people into smoking, but the evidence does not support this. There are competing explanations for why adolescents who vape subsequently smoke, most compellingly, that adolescents attracted to vaping are also attracted to smoking. Stronger evidence comes from population studies, which show that e-cigarettes are associated with declines in smoking prevalence among adolescents (Foxon & Selya, 2020), while appropriate matching suggests that vaping is associated

with a reduced risk of smoking uptake (Shahab *et al.* 2020). Moreover, vaping among US adolescents is far less prevalent than commonly asserted. Smoking prevalence is typically defined in the USA as having smoked at least 100 cigarettes. Defined the same way, around 2.5% of never smoking US adolescents are regular vapers (Foxon & Selya, 2020). This is too many and higher than in the UK (Action on Smoking & Health, 2019), probably because of stricter regulation of e-cigarettes in the UK than the USA.

Chung *et al.* assert there may be risks to vapers, and we do not demur. However, we would refer colleagues to a US consensus report that reviews the safety and concludes that e-cigarettes are less damaging than smoking (National Academies of Sciences *et al.* 2018). Vaping helps people quit smoking, while those who vape and smoke probably reduce harm because of reduced smoking intensity, and few non-smokers, including adolescents, become regular vapers. Consequently, e-cigarettes reduce harm to society.

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Additional information

Competing interests

None.

Author contributions

Both authors have contributed to the conception or design of the work and drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content. Both authors have approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work. All persons designated as authors qualify for authorship, and all those who qualify for authorship are listed.

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addiction, e-cigarettes, smoking cessation

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Comments

Last words by Begh & Aveyard

Last words by Chung *et al.*