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Embrace safer alternatives for effective smoking cessation

It has been scientifically proven that the alternative products – E-cigarettes, snus, nicotine pouches and heat-not-burn – are less harmful than combustible smoking and can be used as effective smoking cessation aid. But it is so unfortunate that the misleading information and a prohibitionist approach towards the alternatives are the stumbling blocks in efforts to end combustible smoking.

A recent study, conducted by Aga Khan University and Multan Medical and Dental College, claims, within the last five years the use of e-cigarettes has increased from 29% to 40% in Pakistan and most teenagers and adults are addicted to them. Based

on the findings of the survey, local media and tobacco control activists asked concerned authorities to curb their usage by enforcing legislation.

Actually, the findings of the study are contradictory and in favor of the alternatives. According to the findings, 20.5% respondents believe e-cigarettes are extremely effective and 56.3% think they are slightly less harmful in helping people quit smoking. While 23.6% believe e-cigarettes are much less harmful and 41.2% think they are slightly less harmful than regular cigarettes. Additionally, 59% believe e-cigarettes helped to reduce their smoking habit.

Internationally, there are countries such as the UK, Sweden, Norway and Japan which use the alternatives as cessation aid to reduce the smoking prevalence in their countries. Sweden is a country which has successfully dropped down the smoking ratio to 5.6% by adopting alternatives and will soon become

the world's first smoke-free country by further reducing the smoking rate to 5%.

On the other hand, there are countries which have banned the alternatives or avoid their use, smoking is still a big problem there.

Today Pakistan has around 31m smokers and most of them are cigarette users. According to estimates, 400 people die daily in the country because of tobacco-induced diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease etc. Estimates show, the cost of tobacco consumption is Rs615bn per annum which is equal to 1.6% of the country's GDP. On the other hand, the tax

collection was only 20% of the total smoking cost in 2019. Today Pakistan has around 400 vape shops, though the use of e-cigarettes remains unregulated in the country. Pakistan needs to learn from the experiences of western countries, and avoid portraying the safer alternatives in negative light to reduce the smoking prevalence in the country. If sensibly regulated, the alternatives can help adult smokers to quit smoking. However, young people should be kept away from the use of alternatives because they are useful for the adult smokers who want to quit smoking but are unable to do so.

A smoke-free Pakistan is possible to achieve. For this, the government should make effective cessation services accessible and affordable with sensible regulations for the use of alternatives.

Why THR in Pakistan?

- More than 31 million tobacco users in Pakistan
- Daily smoking prevalence in populations aged 10 and above – 12.9% (GATS survey 2014)
- Total costs of all smoking-attributable diseases and deaths in 2019 - US\$ 3.85 billion
- Number of deaths from smoking in 2017 – 128, 589

E-cigarette as smoking cessation aid



E-cigarettes do have value as a smoking cessation aid, according to a new study just released by a team of MUSC Hollings Cancer Center researchers.

Whether e-cigarettes should be considered for smoking cessation is a hotly debated topic, and different countries have taken different approaches. E-cigarettes contain harmful chemicals, which has led many public health advocates to shun them. But they are less harmful than traditional cigarettes, which can cause a dozen types of cancer as well as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. That's prompted others to say that e-cigarettes should be considered as a step-down method for adults who smoke and haven't been able to quit using FDA-approved aids, like nicotine replacement gum, lozenges or patches.

This new study, the largest trial of e-cigarettes in the U.S., showed that e-cigarette usage nudged people toward quitting smoking – even people who had entered the trial saying they had no intention of quitting. The results were published in *eClinical Medicine* this month.

"This is not a panacea for smoking cessation," cautioned Matthew Carpenter, Ph.D., first author on the paper and co-leader of the Cancer Control Research Program at Hollings.

Nonetheless, he was surprised to find that all of the hypotheses tested in the study were confirmed.

"It's rarely the case that you're proven correct for almost everything that you predicted," he said. "Here, it was one effect after another: No matter how we looked at it, those who got the e-cigarette product demonstrated greater abstinence and reduced harm as compared to those who didn't get it."

Carpenter and his colleagues, including Hollings members Tracy Smith, Ph.D., Jennifer Dahne, Ph.D., Michael Cummings, Ph.D., and Graham Warren, Ph.D., designed the study in a naturalistic way to mimic real-world conditions as much as possible – also a first for e-cigarette studies.

Previous studies that have shown a smoking cessation benefit of e-cigarettes have been very structured, Carpenter said, in that they recruited people who wanted to stop smoking and gave them very detailed instructions about how to use the e-cigarettes.

"Some people have said, 'That's fine, but the results of those studies don't apply to the real world because the real world isn't as structured,'" he explained. "So, what we did was take a hands-off approach – we called it a naturalistic approach." "First off, we took smokers who did and did not want to quit.

So right off the bat, not everybody wanted to quit. Secondly, we gave them very little instruction on how to use it," he continued.

Instead, people were given e-cigarettes and told they could use them or not, as much or as little as they wanted. A control group didn't receive anything.

The study showed that people in the e-cigarette group were more likely to report complete abstinence from combustible cigarettes. They were also more likely to report that they'd reduced the number of cigarettes per day that they smoked and their number of "quit attempts." Quit attempts are an important metric because people usually need multiple tries before they can successfully stop smoking.

The study included people from 11 cities across the U.S. and spanned four years. At the beginning, Carpenter intended to collect biochemical samples from participants in the Charleston area to verify their self-reports of smoking behavior. However, COVID interrupted that plan and made in-person sample collection impossible.

Although that was a disappointing aspect of the study, replying on participants' self-reports of their smoking behavior is still considered highly reliable, he said.

The study will be another data point for the public health community and policymakers in deciding how to handle e-cigarettes. "No one wants e-cigarettes in the hands of kids, and we should do all we can to stop that. But we shouldn't do so by denying this option for adult smokers who can't otherwise quit," Carpenter said. He noted that other countries have taken a much more liberal approach to e-cigarette use than the U.S.

For example, in April the U.K. announced a "Swap to Stop" program that will distribute vaping starter kits to 1 million people who smoke.

In the U.S., e-cigarettes are not approved as smoking cessation aids. But Carpenter and Smith have just received funding for a study that will test e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid for adult smokers who've already tried two different FDA-approved methods. And Benjamin Toll, Ph.D., director of the MUSC Health Tobacco Treatment Program, co-authored a commentary this month urging an education campaign for adult smokers to clarify that, while neither option is "safe," traditional cigarettes are far more harmful than e-cigarettes.

<https://www.newswise.com/articles/most-extensive-u-s-study-on-e-cigarettes-demonstrates-their-effectiveness-as-smoking-cessation-aid?fbclid=IwAR2eLRVvcPIDMuM7tRJHbNz8V-tBSDHNIF7icGGZQo6XvdzJ9qS1RoQqfC8>

EU remains divided about snus despite its success in Norway

Following in Sweden's successful footsteps, Norway has reached a relatively low smoking rate thanks to the widespread use of snus. Despite these positive data, the European Union (EU) remains divided about the product.

Norway's smoking rate is at 14%, while the EU's average is 23%, and snus is considered the main contributor to this success. A new study in *Discover: Social Science and Health* which used data from the Norwegian Directorate for Health, confirmed that snus was the most commonly used smoking cessation aid and also the most successful one at getting Norwegians to stop smoking.

A previous study, "How Has the Availability of Snus Influenced Cigarette Smoking in Norway?", has shown that as snus rose in popularity, from 9% to 33% between 1985 and 2013, smoking rates dropped from 50% to 21%. Politico said that nowadays in Norway, snus is used by approximately 25% of men and 10% of women.

This study also revealed that men and women choose different smoking aids. With men preferring snus at 21%, versus 12% of women. While women (at 15%) preferred smoking cessation apps versus 6% of men. On the other hand, snus was found to be the most effective cessation aid. The EU remains resistant to safer nicotine alternatives and remains divided about the product. Sweden remains the only EU country where snus is legal, and non-coincidentally it is also the only country which has achieved the much sought after smoke free status. This poses a problem for conservatives in the EU who would like to ban or heavily tax the product.

During an event held last May on World No Tobacco Day, "Recipe for a Smoke-Free Europe: Learnings from the Swedish Experience," three MEPs: Tomislav Sokol of the European People's Party (EPP) group, Sara Skyttedal, also from the EPP, and Johan Nissinen from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, discussed snus extensively. Together with a group of researchers from global network We Are Innovation, the MEPs described the successful strategy employed by Sweden, which consists of a holistic approach embracing tobacco harm reduction.

In 2022, Skyttedal brought the fight to the European Commission. "If the Tobacco Products Directive is to be revised to take account of the fight against cancer, does the Commission share the view that the EU needs to change its regulation of snus?" Skyttedal asked EC Commissioner Stella Kyriakides. In response to the MEP's arguments, Kyriakides said that the EC's stance remains unchanged as snus and other oral tobacco products have been linked to cancer and other adverse health effects.

The commissioner's response prompted a strong reaction from Skyttedal, who pointed out that actually most snus



studies found little or no links to cancer. She went on to cite the Lancet's Global Burden of Diseases as well as a 2020 study published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, both of which concluded that in fact there is no evidence to suggest a link between snus and cancer.

In fact, as the MEP rightly highlighted, snus has not only led to Sweden boasting the lowest smoking rates in Europe, but also to reducing Sweden's tobacco-related deaths by half the EU average, despite leaving the overall tobacco usage on par with the EU average.

Perceptions on smokeless tobacco products in the U.S. Meanwhile a recent study published in *PLoS One* surveyed young individuals in the United States about their awareness, perception and likelihood to use nicotine pouches (NPs) and other smokeless tobacco products such as snus.

Titled, "Awareness, susceptibility, and use of oral nicotine pouches and comparative risk perceptions with smokeless tobacco among young adults in the United States," the study examined the awareness/use of and susceptibility to NPs among young adults in the US aged between 18 and 25, who were asked to complete an anonymous 20-minute online survey between September 2021 and October 2021.

The compiled responses indicated that of the 609 subjects included in the study, 10.3% had never used NPs was 10.3%, which was lower than that of other tobacco products. A total of 41.5% of subjects knew about NPs and 23.5% would consider using them in the future.

Moreover, the 10% rate of NP use was higher in young adults than prior estimates in smokers, high school students, and people between 18-20 years of age at 5.6%, 3%, and 5.2%, respectively. The researchers concluded that young adults had more awareness and were more favorable perceptions of NPs.

https://www.vapingpost.com/2023/08/22/the-eu-remains-divided-about-snus-while-another-report-indicates-its-effectivity/?fbclid=IwAR0UW6tbMImY9J05LR8rXaXbBgi33bJbcYxmOnkF--r-cDGOdOBp7SjrQ_g

Smoking levels drop in Russia

Russian cigarette sales drop as smokers shift to e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, according to Rosstat data. According to data released by the Russian Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) on August 28th, the sales volume of regular cigarettes in Russia is declining as smokers are shifting from traditional cigarettes to e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products.

According to the data, the per capita retail sales volume of various types of cigarettes in Saint Petersburg, Russia, showed an average year-on-year decline of 47% from January to June 2023. In the same period last year, from January to June 2022, the average number of cigarettes sold per person per month in Saint Petersburg was 133, while currently it is only 70. Comparing to the results from the first six months of last year, Saint Petersburg sold an average of 70 cigarettes per person per month.

The decrease in cigarette sales in some major cities may be attributed to the growing popularity of new products, including e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products. Polina Vilichkina, leader of the big data company "Evotor," points out that the decline in regular cigarette sales is a trend in Russia in recent years. However, this does not mean that people are quitting smoking but rather that smokers are shifting from traditional cigarettes to e-cigarettes.

According to Vilichkina, the younger generation is increasingly turning to e-cigarettes rather than traditional cigarettes when they start smoking.

Furthermore, the growth rate of e-cigarette sales is higher than the decline rate of traditional cigarettes.

At the same time, the sales of smokeless nicotine products are also increasing. It is estimated that the number of stores selling Swedish snus has doubled in the past year. Despite Russia banning the sale of Swedish snus since 2015, smokeless nicotine mixtures are not legally restricted at the federal level. However, authorities in some regions, such as the Arkhangelsk Oblast, do not allow the sale of such products. Experts believe that the unusual nature of sales data in Saint Petersburg may be attributed to a miscalculation in the statistical methods used by the Russian Federal State Statistics Service.

However, experts believe that the decline in official sales might also be genuine, as the data from the National Statistics Bureau is based on tax revenues and does not account for counterfeit products. Given the decrease in people's income, many individuals have started saving money and turned to purchasing goods from the grey market. According to experts' estimates, there are numerous websites on the internet that offer opportunities to purchase cigarettes at significantly lower prices than the official rates. However, analyst Ivan Fegekov claims that all products sold on these websites are counterfeit.

<https://www.2firsts.com/news/the-decline-of-traditional-cigarettes-russians-switch-to-e-cigarettes?fbclid=IwAR2eLRVvcPIDMuM7tRjHbNz8V-tB5DNIF7icGGZQo6XvdzJ9q51RoQqfC8>

Chewing tobacco banned



KARACHI: The nauseating sight of red splashes of chewed pan, gutka, and mainpuri at government offices is nothing new.

However, the caretaker government in its brief sting of power has taken it upon itself to ban the tobacco chews at government buildings, particularly the hospitals.

Caretaker Sindh Minister for Health Dr Saad Niaz Khalid has imposed a ban on the consumption of pan, gutka, mainpuri,

and cigarettes for government office and hospital staff during their duty hours, falling under the jurisdiction of the Sindh Health Department.

The directive, conveyed through an official written order, emphasizes that stringent measures will be enforced against personnel found in breach of these regulations. The minister expressed strong dissatisfaction regarding the use of pan, gutka, mainpuri, and cigarettes within the premises of government offices and hospitals under the health department.

Acting upon his concerns, he instructed the Sindh Health Department Director General Dr Irshad Memon to initiate a ban on these substances within all offices.

Dr Irshad has issued written orders to all relevant institutions, emphasizing the strict implementation of the ban. Those found in violation of these directives will face rigorous disciplinary actions.

https://tribune.com.pk/story/2432493/tobacco-chews-banned-at-hospitals?fbclid=IwAR0USPtCNcpIDEH3InjgeJ70EaDJ_EPERHqPN0xFRP1n3-afwF6pFdo3dOg

Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

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