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Health professionals have misconceptions about nicotine: study

More than two-thirds of health professionals (70%) in Pakistan perceive nicotine as carcinogenic, according to a new study.

The study - Knowledge towards Public Health Practitioners' Knowledge towards Nicotine and Other Cigarette Components on Various Human Diseases in Pakistan: A Contribution to Smoking Cessation Policies by Alternative Research Initiative - maintains that awareness regarding nicotine is lacking not only in the general population but also among public health practitioners. This lack of knowledge is one of the key barriers to bringing down the prevalence of smoking in Pakistan.

Using primary survey data and nonparametric econometric techniques, this study assessed the knowledge of nicotine and harm reduction among public health practitioners in Pakistan.

Results indicate physicians have misconceptions about nicotine. The majority of the medical professionals associated nicotine use with birth defects, cancer, cardiovascular illness, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). More than two-thirds of doctors (70%) strongly agreed and 17.9% somewhat agreed with the statement that nicotine causes cancer.

When health professionals were asked to rate the risk of components of combustible smoking, most termed carbon monoxide as the most dangerous, followed by tar, tobacco, and inhaled smoke.

Health professionals seemed to be divided over the safety of electronic cigarettes compared to tobacco. One-third termed them safer, while the remaining one-fourth were undecided. Nearly half of doctors believe electronic cigarettes are ineffective in helping smokers quit smoking. Two-thirds would not recommend them as a cessation aid.

Doctors did not see electronic cigarettes as an alternative to



reducing the risk of combustible smoking or as a product to help in quitting smoking. A little more than one-fifth of doctors did not know about the electronic cigarettes. Overall doctors were divided on the safety of electronic cigarettes compared to tobacco; one-third thought electronic cigarettes were safer while 41.4% think otherwise, and one-fourth did not have any opinion in this regard. Almost half of the doctors (49%) did not see electronic cigarettes as effective in quitting smoking, and two-third would not recommend them as a cessation aid. Similarly, doctors (65.4%) thought electronic cigarettes should be prohibited.

The study suggests physicians need to be better informed about the fact that nicotine in tobacco products is addictive while chemicals, particularly those causing combustion, are the primary risk sources for tobacco-related illnesses. Misconceptions regarding nicotine can be quickly remedied with communication interventions. The study also suggests that alternative nicotine delivery systems can help smoking cessation and reduce the consumption of combustible tobacco in Pakistan.

E-cigarettes for harm reduction in adults

A study published in The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse reiterates the need to embrace the use of e-cigarettes (ECs) as harm reduction tools.

Titled, "A targeted approach to using e-cigarettes for harm reduction in adults," the paper highlights that the negative perceptions of ECs and widespread inaccurate belief that they are equal or more harmful than combustible cigarettes, represents a significant missed public health opportunity. The paper outlines the need to overcome such perceptions and openly explore the potential use of EC as a harm-reduction strategy in smokers who otherwise find it really hard to quit. Supporting this argument, a recent review of randomized controlled trials and network meta-analysis of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation, found that smokers assigned to use nicotine e-cigarettes were more likely to remain abstinent from smoking, than those assigned to using licensed NRTs.

ECs vs NRTs

Titled, "A systematic review of randomized controlled trials and network meta-analysis of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation," the study compared the effectiveness of nicotine e-cigarettes for smoking cessation with licensed nicotine

replacement therapies (NRT) and nicotine-free based control conditions.

The researchers searched PubMed, Web of Science and PsycINFO for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that allocated individuals to use nicotine e-cigarettes, compared to those that used licensed NRT (e.g., nicotine patches, nicotine gums) or a placebo. The research team selected only studies which included smoking participants who were healthy.

Sifting through data from thousands of studies, the research team identified that smokers who turned to nicotine e-cigarettes were more likely to remain abstinent from smoking than those in the control condition. "Smokers assigned to use nicotine e-cigarettes were more likely to remain abstinent from smoking than those assigned to use licensed NRT, and both were more effective than usual care or placebo conditions. More high-quality studies are required to ascertain the effect of e-cigarette on smoking cessation due to risk of bias in the included studies," concluded the study.

<https://www.vapingpost.com/2022/09/16/the-importance-of-considering-e-cigarettes-as-harm-reduction-tools/>

Switching to vaping helpful in giving up smoking

Junaid Ali Khan

Adnan Abbasi, 33, started smoking in 2008. Ten years later, he decided to quit smoking after facing health issues including anxiety and shortness of breath. For this, Abbasi started vaping in 2018. He successfully quit smoking in two months after switching to vaping.

"I found vaping less harmful and a possible solution to quit smoking," Abbasi told Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) in Saddar, Rawalpindi.

"Vaping helped me in giving up smoking, now, I use e-cigarette in a reduced level."

The total cost of diseases and deaths caused by smoking in Pakistan was 3.85 billion dollars in 2019.

In 2018, One of Abbasi's friends introduced him to e-cigarette. On his friend's advice, he decided to try vaping in his efforts to give up smoking. "I decided to give vaping a try for giving up smoking."

According to various estimates, Pakistan has around 120 vaping outlets in the upscale localities of major cities. Legally imported, e-cigarettes are being used without regulations. According to a KAP study conducted by ARI, friends are the main source of introduction on vaping in Pakistan. Importantly, the smokers who switch to vaping do not consult a doctor.

Abbasi says he remained a dual user of smoking and vaping for two months. As he shifted to vaping, he started feeling the positive effects. "No anxiety, tiredness, smell and no shortness of breath."

After giving up combustible cigarette, he has started to decrease the level of nicotine in his vaping. "My nicotine use has dropped from 50mg to 03mg. Now, I use 03mg nicotine in e-cigarette." Abbasi recalls that before switching to vaping, he used 10 cigarettes a day. He was spending Rs5,000 a month on cigarette smoking. When asked about the high prices of vaping devices and juices in Pakistan, he main-

tained that the price of vaping device ranges from Rs.4000 to Rs.25,000 but in the long run, they prove to be cheaper. He spends Rs.5,000 a month on vaping, adding that "spending Rs.5,000 on vaping is better than spending on cigarette smoking because smoking is harmful while vaping is less harmful and helpful in quitting smoking."

Currently there is no law in Pakistan on the level of nicotine in the vaping. In the UK, according to NHS, e-cigarettes are tightly regulated for safety and quality. The law restricts e-cigarette tanks to a capacity of no more than 2ml, with maximum volume of nicotine-containing e-liquid for sale in one refill container to 10ml, and e-liquids to a nicotine strength of no more than 20mg/ml.

NHS says e-cigarettes do not produce tar or carbon monoxide, two of the most harmful elements in tobacco smoke. It adds that nicotine is the addictive substance in cigarettes, it's relatively harmless. "Almost all of the harm from smoking comes from the thousands of other chemicals in tobacco smoke, many of which are toxic."

When asked about awareness on vaping in Pakistan, Abbasi maintained that there is lack of awareness among masses on the use of vaping. He added, that tobacco industry opposes vaping and people have no idea about the facts and role of vaping in ending smoking. He said, there is a lack of information about vaping among politicians as well and this is a big challenge in country like Pakistan to utilize alternatives in fight against smoking. "If govt bans vaping, around 40 percent of the vaper users will restart smoking."

Most of the smokers, he said want to quit smoking but are unable to because of lack of effective smoking cessation services. He believes, "there are two million people in Pakistan who use vaping for quitting smoking."

Giving up smoking after shifting to vaping, he thinks it can help adult smokers in quitting smoking.

Tobacco transformation index shows differentiated progress toward harm reduction across 15 largest companies

The second edition of the Tobacco Transformation Index® (“Index”) has been published after two years of research into the efforts of the world’s 15 largest tobacco companies to reduce the harm of their products. The results in the 2022 Index demonstrate that the majority are delivering limited progress, with high-risk products (HRPs, cigarettes and combustible tobacco) still accounting for around 95% of retail sales volume.

The Index was created to accelerate the reduction of harm caused by tobacco use by ranking the world’s 15 largest tobacco companies on their relative progress or the lack thereof. This is the second iteration of the Index, the first was published in 2020.

The 2022 Index evaluates tobacco companies’ behavior across six categories and 35 underlying indicators that cover measures indicative of harm reduction, from product sales to capital allocation and marketing policies.

Swedish Match ranked first in the 2022 Index, with Philip Morris International, Altria, and British American Tobacco in second, third, and fourth places, respectively; Indonesian company Djarum ranked last.

The key takeaways from the 2022 Index findings are as follows:

Only Swedish Match sells a greater volume of reduced-risk products (RRPs) than substantially more harmful combustibles, due in most part to the popularity of its snus in Sweden and non-tobacco nicotine pouches in the US. A key feature underpinning the Index is its adoption of the Relative Risk Assessment, based on a systematic review of scientific studies of the health risks associated with 15 nicotine products.

Four Index Companies directed the majority of capital and R&D investments toward RRP. In addition, five Index Companies, including three state-owned entities, made incremental investments or early indications of movement toward future production of RRP during the review period. However, tobacco companies are also failing to invest in harm reduction in low- and middle-income countries, with the vast majority of sales for their RRP concentrated in markets with the highest disposable income. Notably, RRP are banned in a number of countries around the world. High-risk products made up around 95% of retail sales volume across the 15 largest tobacco companies in 2021; Reduced-risk products 5%

Tobacco harm reduction momentum is developing across a subset of the 15 companies, albeit to varying degrees. Companies analyzed across six categories and 35 indicators on their actions to reduce harm caused by tobacco use; Swedish Match making the most relative progress. David Janazzo, Index Program Officer and Interim Co-President, EVP Operations and Finance, and Chief Financial Officer at the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, said: “Transformation of the tobacco industry toward harm reduction remains inconsistent and in its early stages. That said, the 2022 Index demonstrates that differentiation is



forming across the largest tobacco companies, related to measures of commitment, performance, and transparency. While some companies are making progress, others regressed. On the whole, they are all failing to deliver outcomes toward a world in which combustible, other forms of toxic tobacco, and smoking related death and disease are eliminated, in order to accomplish the Foundation’s mission of ending smoking in a generation.

“Based on the current trajectory of smoking rates, it is estimated that by the end of the current century up to one billion people will die of smoking. The majority of those will live in developing countries, which is why transformation of the tobacco industry is both essential and urgent.

“It is my hope that industry leaders will take heed of the findings in the 2022 Index to push forward and intensify efforts to strengthen harm reduction strategies and tactics.” Erik Bloomquist, global nicotine and tobacco investment analyst and consultant, CFA and Chair of the Index Technical Committee, said:

“Institutional investors such as banks and pension funds are increasingly looking at harm and harm reduction. The Index is an important tool for those investors to constructively engage and encourage change in the market.

“The 2022 Index is a reminder of how far tobacco companies have to go. The differing and at times hostile regulatory standards around the world have made implementation of harm reduction more challenging, but many opportunities are not yet fully maximized.”

About The Tobacco Transformation Index®:

The Tobacco Transformation Index® is a Foundation for a Smoke-Free World initiative designed to deliver on a key goal and related purpose of the Foundation, namely, to drive the transformation of tobacco companies for the benefit of public health, and to inform the public about the activities of the tobacco industry that influence achieving a smoke-free world.

<https://www.smokefree-world.org/newsroom/the-2022-tobacco-transformation-indextm-demonstrates-differentiated-progress-toward-harm-reduction-across-the-15-largest-tobacco-companies/>

Improving public health by adopting smoke-free technologies

Salman Khan

The most obvious and simplest solution for smokers to protect their health is to quit smoking immediately but as we see, while many smokers struggle against their habit only to relapse, many smokers simply continue to smoke. In this situation, instead of leaving these smokers behind who would otherwise continue to smoke, the realistic approach should be to identify how to reduce their burden of health risks. The answer lies in the scientifically substantiated, smoke-free technologies that are slowly but surely, proving to be an effective tool in reducing cigarette-related harm.

The smoke-free products work on the basic principle of eliminating combustion. When a cigarette is lit, it burns tobacco to produce smoke which is severely toxic. The smoke-free alternatives on the other hand prevent burning of tobacco and thus eliminates smoke and the consequent toxic chemicals from being released. There are a wide range of products in the smoke-free category with more innovative technologies being produced to help smokers as much as possible. Some of the products in this category are e-cigarettes or vapes that do not contain tobacco and instead burn the flavoured e-liquid. Heated tobacco products (HTPs) are another excellent technology in the category of smoke-free products which are based on heat-not-burn principle. The products heat the tobacco instead of burning it while giving smokers more or less the same experience as smoking a cigarette but with considerably lower levels of harm. Other products such as snuff or oral nicotine pouches also prevent the smoker from inhaling toxic cigarette smoke. While these products may not be risk-free, they are scientifically proven to minimize tobacco related harm for smokers and reduce risks of diseases attributed to cigarettes.

As more innovative products are being made to reduce tobacco harm for smokers, growing numbers of scientists, public health experts and governments are acknowledging



the role smoke-free alternatives can play in addressing the global public health issue of smoking. The effectiveness of these products can also be seen in Japan as well where cigarette sales dropped five-times faster after the introduction of heated tobacco products in the country. Countries like, the UK, New Zealand and several others have also adopted smoke-free products as part of their public health strategy to reduce tobacco harm and have regulated them accordingly.

The example of these countries which understood the comparative health benefits of smoke-free alternatives, respected the preferences of smokers, and prioritized better public health outcomes, are reaping the benefits by showing flexibility and open-mindedness towards the scientifically backed, innovative solutions that are being produced for reducing harm for smokers. If more countries adopt such policies, it might result in substantial reduction in harm caused by smoking for smokers globally.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Sep-2022/improving-pub->

Court rejects plea against use of nicotine patches

KARACHI: The Sindh High Court (SHC) has rejected a plea to ban nicotine patches as a substitute for cigarettes.

The court ruled on the petition that imposing a complete ban on all commercial activities was impossible. The concerned administration or legislative bodies should investigate this issue.

The petition was filed on behalf of Iram Khan. It was stated that nicotine patches are banned in Europe, America, and other developed countries. Nicotine patches are being manufactured in Pakistan without any hindrance. While gutka and mawa are declared hazardous to health and their use is prohibited, nicotine patches are more hazardous.

The court reserved the verdict after hearing the arguments of the parties' attorneys.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2373534/shc-rejects-plea-against-use-of-nicotine-patches>

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.

To know more about us, please visit: www.aripk.com and www.panthr.org

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