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Letter to the Editor

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Vaping is the Gateway to Smoking Cigarettes

I refer to the report on a panel discussion on vaping with the headline *Learn from NZ and UK to reduce smoking (NST, 27/9/22)*.

The message that has come out of the discussion is that e-cigarettes and vaping are relatively harmless and is the path to quitting smoking. The panelists also feared that if the GEG Bill becomes law there will be increased robberies and illicit trade in cigarettes. Their fear is misplaced. What is needed is effective law enforcement.

The panelists' claim that e-cigarettes are harmless is not based on any credible scientific evidence. Electronic cigarettes and vaping have serious health effects as evidenced by a number of scientific reports.

The National Center for Epidemiology and Population Health of Australian National University carried out research on worldwide contemporary evidence on health outcomes relating to e-cigarettes and published a 361-page report.

The report states that the use of e-cigarettes results in the inhalation of a complex array of aerosolised chemicals, including nicotine, originating from the e-liquid, chemical reactions in the heating coil and the device itself.

Toxicological studies indicate that exposure to these substances can result in adverse health effects. Nicotine is highly addictive and there is evidence from basic human and animal studies that it adversely affects cardiovascular measures and brain development and functioning.

The other findings of the research included:

- non-smokers who initiate e-cigarette use are 3 times more likely than non-e-cigarette users to take up smoking;
- former smokers who use e-cigarettes are twice as likely to relapse back to smoking than non-e-cigarette users;
- e-cigarettes are either ineffective as a cessation aid or no more effective than safer alternatives including those approved for therapeutic use; and
- e-cigarette use in Australia is highest among teenagers and young adults.

Of great concern to public health experts is the growing body of research suggesting a possible relationship between e-cigarette use and the uptake and escalation of smoking among young people.

Research, published in the journal *Addiction*, shows that 14-year-olds who use e-cigarettes are 5 times as likely to take up smoking by age 17 as non-e-cigarette users and 3 times as likely to be frequent smokers.

The new study tracked more than 10,000 adolescents from 2012 to 2019 and found that there was a strong relationship between e-cigarette use and smoking with dual use and gateway effects in both directions. Both e-cigarette and tobacco use in 14-year-olds were a catalyst for longer-term use of both forms of nicotine.

In view of this compelling evidence of harm from the smoking of e-cigarettes, how could the panelists tell the public that e-cigarette is the gateway for people to stop smoking?

Smoking e-cigarettes is spreading rapidly among our youths, like in many other countries. We should heed Johns Hopkins University's Professor of Medicine, Dr Michael Baha's warning that "We might be causing the next smoking epidemic through young people getting addicted to electronic cigarettes early in life."

Our GEG law is the answer to preventing this potential epidemic. So, parliamentarians, get on with it and enact the law soon in the next parliamentary session.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
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