E-Cigarettes – Why bans on use in enclosed public spaces would be detrimental to the public health goals of Scotland.

Despite significant falls in adult smoking prevalence in Scotland over previous years, according to the Scottish Household survey the rate of decline stagnated from 2011 – 2013 with prevalence remaining at around 23% [1]. The Scottish Health Survey[2] painted a slightly different picture, with smoking prevalence declining from 25% to 21% between 2012 and 2013. However, even this lower rate still represents some 1 million smokers and approximately 13,000 avoidable deaths from smoking related diseases in each year.

In April 2014 ASH Scotland reported an increase in e-cigarette use among adult smokers from 3% in 2010 to 17% in 2014, with current use among those who have never smoked described as zero, or nearly zero[3].

Whilst the study designs do not allow us to conclude that the increase in e-cigarette use has caused the decline in smoking prevalence, it is certainly a distinct possibility that it has contributed to it, and indicates that the increased use of e-cigarettes has not resulted in an increase in smoking as some feared.

The Scottish Government has set an ambitious target to reduce smoking prevalence to 5% by 2034, and this will not be achieved without embracing and supporting tobacco harm reduction products, and those who choose to use them to reduce the burden of harm to their own health from smoking lit tobacco.

Is there any justification for a ban on using e-cigarettes in enclosed public spaces?

In short, no. Smoke free legislation was enacted in order to protect employees and the public from the perceived harmful effects of second hand smoke. There is no combustion and therefore no smoke in e-cigarette aerosol. There is no credible evidence of any potential for harm to bystanders from exhaled aerosols from e-cigarettes. In a systematic review conducted in 2014 Igor Burstyn concluded that: *"Exposures of bystanders are likely to be orders of magnitude less [compared to the users themselves], and thus pose no apparent concern."* [4]

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[1] Scottish Government: 'Scottish Household Survey' http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/TrendSmoking

[2] Scottish Government: 'Scottish Health Survey' http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/12/1442/1

[3] ASH Scotland: 'Use of e-cigarettes soars in Scotland' http://www.ashscotland.org.uk/media-and-comment/press-releases-and-comments/yougov-e-cig-results.aspx

[4] Igor Burstyn: 'Peering Through the Mist' http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/18

Would a ban on use in enclosed public spaces have a negative effect on those using them to quit or reduce their tobacco consumption?

Yes. Nicotine delivery is still very much slower from e-cigarettes than tobacco cigarettes and particularly when using nicotine liquid strengths under the maximum which will be permissible under the EU Tobacco Products Directive, i.e. 20mg/ml[5]. Because of this, patterns of actual use of e-cigarettes differ from those of smoking. Whilst a smoker will smoke an entire cigarette in 5 minutes and then not smoke again until nicotine levels have dropped to a level which triggers the desire to smoke, an e-cigarette user will take one or two puffs every few minutes in order to keep nicotine levels up and prevent cravings. Both the ability to vape in places where smoking is not permitted and the differing patterns of actual use assist the user to disassociate the use of nicotine from the act of smoking. Forcing e-cigarette users to go outside to vape, often to places where they will be among smokers and also perhaps in time limited situations, may encourage them to smoke instead in order to increase nicotine levels quickly within the time available.

Additionally, if it is true that smoking bans discourage people from smoking then the same will be true for vaping, however many smokers either do not want to or are unable to cease nicotine use. Bans diminish the value proposition of e-cigarettes (compared with traditional cigarettes) and at the same time communicate the message that e-cigarettes are as dangerous as smoking. This will therefore discourage smokers from making the complete switch to the safer alternative.

Usage bans coupled with misinformation campaigns concerning relative safety in Spain recently led to a 70% drop in sales of vapour products[6], which for a country with smoking prevalence as high as Spain is nothing short of a tragedy.

Would a ban on use in enclosed public spaces reduce the number of smokers who try to switch or reduce tobacco consumption in future?

Yes, for broadly the same reasons as above. Many smokers try e-cigarettes because they are perceived as safer and they can use them where they cannot smoke. A significant number of them then go on to switch completely, even if they hadn't intended to give up smoking. This phenomenon is well known to vapers, who describe it as 'accidental quitting'.

Would the use of e-cigarettes in enclosed spaces renormalize smoking behaviour or cause young people and never smokers to initiate use and addiction to nicotine as a gateway to smoking?

Whilst in theory this is possible there is no evidence in surveys to date that it is happening. Professor Robert West of University College London recently concluded from his studies that *"Despite claims that electronic cigarettes risk renormalising smoking, we found no evidence to support this."* And Deborah Arnott of ASH London commented in the same article that *"The dramatic rise in use of electronic cigarettes over the past four years suggests that smokers are increasingly turning to these devices to help them cut down or quit smoking. Significantly, usage among non-smokers remains negligible"* and *"While it is important to control the advertising of electronic cigarettes to make sure*

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[5] Farsalinos and others :'Nicotine absorption from electronic cigarette use: comparison between first and new-generation devices' http://www.nature.com/srep/2014/140226/srep04133/full/srep04133.html

[6] Think Spain: 'E-cigarette sales in Spain drop by 70 per cent' http://www.thinkspain.com/news-spain/24345/e-cigarette-sales-in-spain-drop-by-70-per-cent

children and non-smokers are not being targeted, there is no evidence from our research that e-cigarettes are acting as a gateway into smoking."[7]

Indeed the "dramatic rise in use of e-cigarettes" would suggest that far from renormalizing smoking, these products are normalising <u>not smoking.</u>

Would permitting e-cigarette use in enclosed public spaces reduce quit rates because smokers would have less incentive to quit?

Not according to studies so far. The Smoking Toolkit Study monitors e-cigarette use and trends in England on a monthly basis and the latest report (January 2015) concludes *"The smoking cessation rate in 2014 is higher than at any time since 2007".*[8]

Would permitting e-cigarette use in enclosed public spaces make enforcement of smoke free legislation more difficult?

Compliance with existing smoke free legislation is very high, and there is no reason to think that the use of e-cigarettes would have any negative effect. E-cigarettes are easily distinguishable from tobacco cigarettes by appearance and smell, and the ability to use an e-cigarette where smoking is not permitted gives smokers a legal alternative. If anything they should assist in delivering still greater compliance.

Conclusion

It is likely that the increase in popularity of e-cigarettes is contributing significantly to the decline in smoking rates in both Scotland and England, and this is something which should be welcomed. Usage bans have the tendency to stigmatise not only the product but also the user, and this together with the actual restrictions on use will serve to discourage switching to the safer product. Usage bans should be a matter not for government, but for individual business and premises managers, who should be supported in order that they can decide for themselves whether to allow the use of e-cigarettes on their property. Smokers who wish to switch to the safer products should be both supported and encouraged to do so.

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[7] BBC News: 'E-cigarette users in UK have 'tripled' since 2010' http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-27161965
[8] West and others: 'Smoking Toolkit Study – Latest Statistics' http://www.smokinginengland.info/latest-statistics/