

Abstract Title: Perceptions and Awareness of E-Cigarettes among South Texas Dentists, Patients and Communities

Background: Electronic cigarettes, also known as e-cigs, vape pens, and/or e-hookahs are battery powered devices that produce an aerosol by heating a liquid that usually contains nicotine—the addictive drug in regular cigarettes, cigars, and other tobacco products. E-cigarettes were introduced in the U.S. in 2007 and have gained substantial popularity. Texans of all ages need accessible, appealing and evidence-based information to help inform uptake and continued use decisions.

Methods: Four focus groups were conducted in May and June 2018, two with dentists and hygienists (n=25) and two with community members (n=23). Recruitment methods included phone, e-mail and flyers. Attention was given to recruiting a representative sample of dental practitioners, smokers and non-smokers from different demographic groups in the community. Participants completed demographic surveys; discussions were recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed.

Results: E-cigarette knowledge among practitioners was limited, practitioners typically do not identify patients as e-cigarette users and evidence-based information and continuing education courses regarding e-cigarette use and its associated health risks were deficient. The overwhelming majority of community participants noted their dental-care providers never asked specifically about e-cig use, almost half viewed e-cigarettes as less dangerous than traditional cigarettes, and the majority reported seeing advertisements promoting e-cigs but no information about its dangerous effects on health in any media source.

Conclusions: Understanding the perceptions of providers and community improves understanding of attitudes, beliefs and knowledge across individual and interpersonal exchanges. The data will inform the design of an evidence-based strategy to best reach community members and dental practitioners. Providing accessible and tailored strategies to improve knowledge of e-cigs and understanding of risks will promote interpersonal communication and is the first step towards addressing this emerging health issue within our community. The interdisciplinary research team will align dental, public health and social service interests to create a multi-level intervention tailored for South Texas populations.