

E-Cigarettes as a Cessation Tool?

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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 products¹.
- E-cigarettes were introduced in the U.S. in 2007 and have gained substantial popularity². They have been marketed for smoking cessation, but research has shown that these devices can contain nicotine, toxins, and metals that are just as harmful as traditional tobacco cigarettes and that, in some cases, those who start using e-cigarettes become dual users³.
- Dental practitioners need to follow the guidance from ADA, that does not recommend the use of e-cigarettes as a method to quit smoking, to educate themselves about their potential harms, and recommend alternative cessation methods that may be more effective and less harmful to their patients⁴.

Method

Four focus groups were conducted in May and June of 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 and community members, and smokers as well as non-smokers from different demographic groups (see **Table 1**) in the community.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants		
Practitioner Participants		
	n	%
Sex		
Male	3	12
Female	22	88
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	12	48
Not Hispanic/Latino	13	52
Race		
White	20	84
Asian	1	4
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	4
Other	2	8
Community Member Participants		
Sex		
Male	9	39
Female	14	61
Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latino	20	87
Not Hispanic/Latino	3	13
Race		
White	17	77
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	9
Other	3	14

Results

Overall, the results from the focus groups showed there is misperception amongst dental practitioners and community members that e-cigarettes are a safe and viable alternative to smoking tobacco cigarettes and could be used, in some cases, as a cessation tool.

Table 2. Pre-survey Practitioner knowledge of e-cigarettes % (n)			
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
Can decrease the number of cigarettes smoked	72% (18)	16% (4)	12% (3)
Can lower the risk of tobacco-related diseases	44% (11)	20% (5)	36% (9)
Can help patients quit smoking	56% (14)	16% (4)	28% (7)
Are safer than regular cigarettes	21% (5)	21% (5)	58% (14)
Are less addictive than regular cigarettes	4% (1)	29% (7)	67% (16)
Have adverse health effects	68% (17)	8% (2)	24% (6)

Practitioners commented, “I do let them know that , no, it probably isn’t safer than traditional tobacco usage. I can’t confirm or deny that, but I can tell you what I have seen from certain studies, and the changes that I see in their mouth.”...“They feel it’s healthier.”

“...but is it more harmful than traditional tobacco usage? We don’t know. So, I do tell them what I do know, and I do have a disclaimer all the time saying, it’s not conclusive, but there are studies to suggest, yes, it could be harmful. That’s how I like to tell them.”

Community members, “No, I think it’s safer. The difference that I felt smoking cigarettes versus e-cigs, to me, I feel like it’s not as strong as a regular cigarette.”

“Less chemicals (in e-cigarettes) I think is a health benefit I think it’s probably less harmful than a tobacco cigarette. I think I’ve noticed maybe I’ve stopped smoking as much with the vape, and then I don’t even pick up the vape that much 'cause I don’t really crave the vape.”

“First of all, you don’t know what you’re putting in your body. You just know you’re putting some kind of vapor in your body. Most people, I don’t know if they really know what it’s made out of. I don’t think most people do the research before they buy it...”

Conclusion

- Based on previous literature, e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool are not recommended.
- Both groups exhibit a disconnect between the perception of e-cigarettes as a “healthy” method to quit smoking and the actual hazards that come from use.
- Providing knowledge about the risks, contrary to what advertising and marketing portrays, will help inform individuals looking for an effective cessation method.
- Education about the risks and the perceived benefits of e-cigarettes allows a more informed decision about their use.
- Community members thought e-cigarettes were safer and less harmful to use compared to traditional tobacco cigarettes.



References

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