

E-Cigarettes Position Statement

The sale of e-cigarettes in pharmacies is becoming more prevalent posing an ethical dilemma for our members. This statement has been drafted after examining the currently available evidence on the safety and efficacy of e-cigarettes and in light of current media and advertising campaigns by tobacco and e-cigarette manufacturers.

Patient Safety

- We recognise that e-cigarettes may add to the number of Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) products currently available, which help people to reduce or quit smoking. However, as of yet there have been limited rigorous peer reviewed studies to support their use as safe and effective NRT products. E-cigarettes are currently unlicensed products with no standardisation of safety, quality or efficacy. As such, they should not be sold or advertised from pharmacies.
- The European Union is currently debating its Tobacco Directive. We support the original June 2013 intention of The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to regulate e-cigarettes as medicinal products as an aid to smoking cessation only. The licensing process would align e-cigarettes with other NRT products and assure the public and patients of their safety and efficacy. Furthermore it would ensure promotion to non smokers was prohibited.
- While we appreciate there is a necessary timescale to ensure patient safety, the licensing process should be as rapid as possible. We are concerned at the precedent of a product being marketed and advertised while regulation as a medicinal product is being progressed.
- If an NRT product is considered the best option for a person attempting to quit or reduce their smoking then pharmacists should encourage the use of licensed NRT products.
- Where someone is unwilling to use a licensed NRT product pharmacists should use their professional judgement when giving advice to patients and the public on the use of e-cigarettes, taking into consideration; current evidence on safety and efficacy; the risks and benefits of using unlicensed e-cigarette products; and the normalising of the smoking habit itself, particularly for young people and non smokers.

Reputational Risk

- As health professionals and providers of NHS care services there is an ethical dilemma supporting the sale of products owned and promoted by tobacco manufacturers.
- As the experts in medicines we cannot support the sale of products with limited scientific evidence on safety.

Public Health

- In order not to undermine recent advances in public health policy, e-cigarettes should be treated in exactly the same way as any other form of smoking, including the same age restrictions as applied to tobacco products and restrictions on their use in public spaces, advertising and displays.
- They should not be irresponsibly advertised and marketed as a lifestyle option or as harmless alternatives to smoking.