

E-cigarette confusion reigns, thanks to misguided authorities

By ACSH Staff — September 16, 2013



^[1]As the controversy swirling around e-cigarettes continues, the

supposed beacons of information we look to for guidance either dither or mislead, sowing confusion instead of informed perspective. Here follow three examples:

The generally-respected UK medical journal *The Lancet*, has in its latest issue an editorial entitled [E-cigarettes: a moral quandary](#) ^[2]. Now, this is not as bad as their decision in 1998 to publish the fraudulent Wakefield study on the MMR vaccine and autism, but it does make me a bit skeptical about how seriously to take *Lancet* editorials in general.

While acknowledging the recent study also published in *The Lancet* showing that low-nicotine-dose e-cigarettes worked at least as well or [better than NRT patches to help smokers quit](#), ^[3] they found it necessary to add: *Marketing also needs to be monitored to ensure that the easy availability of e-cigarettes does not encourage people to start smoking.*

Why, we here at ACSH ask, should e-cigarettes encourage anyone to start smoking? If a kid experimenting with an e-cig gets a nicotine hit, why would they want to move on to dangerous and toxic cigarettes? Vapers vape to **escape** from tobacco. Note, however, ACSH is clearly in favor of banning sales and marketing of e-cigarettes to minors.

The *Lancet* editors conclude with a masterwork of double-think nonsense: *Harm reduction should be our guiding principle, but the prospect of colluding with one of the industries most devastating to health presents a moral quandary that needs to be addressed !*

The ostensibly colluded-with industry Big Tobacco, for those dozing for the past half-century has a *de minimis* presence in the e-cigarette market at this time, which will indeed be expanding over the next couple of years. We in public health should be encouraging tobacco companies to sell more e-cigarettes, and fewer real ones! Their presence in the e-cig market, real or imaginary, should not be used as an excuse to abandon our guiding principle of harm reduction. E-cigarettes should be perceived as a public-health miracle, effectively reducing the toll of cigarette-related disease and death, not as a moral quandary. There is simply nothing immoral about vaping or selling e-cigarettes, period quite the opposite.

Next, we have an [editorial in today's N.Y. Times](#) [4], which using data from a [recent CDC survey](#) [5] showing an increase in teens experimentation with e-cigarettes expresses fears about Big Tobacco seducing teens into lifelong nicotine addiction, sliding down the slope from e-cigs to deadly cigarettes. They put it thusly: *E-cigarette makers, whose ranks now include some big tobacco companies, are mounting a serious effort to attract young smokers with fruit and candy flavors.*

First, the title of the editorial E-smoking Among Teenagers conveys in full force the confusion at the helm of the *Times*. Users of e-cigarettes encounter no smoke, so they are not smokers of anything. Next, as already mentioned, big tobacco company-made e-cigs are few and far between, although that will change. And, attracting young people should indeed be made illegal, but if the kids that were being attracted to e-cigarettes were indeed young **smokers**, that would be a good thing.

The editorial concludes with a call to ban marketing and sales to under-18s we agree and to outlaw flavorings clearly designed to entice children which will reduce the attractiveness of the product much more for adults than for children. How many youngsters actually smoked flavored cigarettes before they were banned? Very few.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross notes the last of this simplistic triple-header: In [his FoxNews op-ed](#) [6], Dr. Marc Siegel calls for e-cigarette regulation to be made moot by requiring them to be dispensed via prescription. This idea is so nonsensical that I shrink from devoting precious space to it; perhaps I secretly hope that it was meant as a joke. Just what we need: more expensive, time-consuming doctor visits for adult smokers trying to quit! Not to mention the lengthy, expensive clinical trials that would be a prerequisite!"

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[2] [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)61918-2/fulltext?version=printerFriendly](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)61918-2/fulltext?version=printerFriendly)

[3] <http://acsh.org/2013/09/ground-breaking-study-supports-e-cigarettes-superiority-over-nicotine-patches/>

[4] http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/16/opinion/e-smoking-among-teenagers.html?nl=opinion&emc=edit_ty_20130916&_r=0

[5] <http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2013/p0905-ecigarette-use.html>

[6] <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2013/09/12/e-cigarettes-let-make-them-available-by-prescription-only/>