

Reduce patient mortality: partner with the local vape shop



Many people turn to e-cigarettes in their attempt to stop smoking. In the UK, for example, there are now nearly 3 million vapers and vape shops serve as their primary source of e-cigarettes. Some 2,000 vape shops are scattered across the country, contributing to a growing industry estimated to be worth more than £600 million annually in the UK alone.

Experts believe these vape shops can be valuable partners of the NHS in its campaign for smoking cessation. The NHS should consider working with reputable vape shops to help smokers quit, suggests a new study from the University of East Anglia, funded by Cancer Research UK.

As the saying goes "bad habits are sometimes hard to break", and there's evidence showing that 90 percent of attempts to quit smoking eventually end in relapse. Lead researcher Dr. Emma Ward, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, explains the difficulty in kicking the habit.

"Smokers are addicted to nicotine, but there are also lots of complex psychosocial behaviours associated with smoking. Nicotine replacement therapy doesn't always address the behavioural and social aspects of smoking, but switching to e-cigarettes can be a really effective way to stop."

The UEA study finds that vape shops provide behavioural support which could help people stop smoking and remain smoke free. And health professionals could benefit from understanding the role that vape shops play in reducing smoking.

Dr. Ward and colleagues examined how vape shops help smokers quit and remain smoke free. They undertook interviews with 40 people who switched to e-cigarettes to attempt to quit smoking. They also worked with six shops in a range of locations to observe interactions between staff and customers.

It was found that vape shops provided effective behavioural support to help quitters stay smoke free. For instance, shop assistants tried their best to understand customers' smoking preferences and give tailored advice about the most appropriate products. In addition, they were an ongoing point of contact for practical help.

"An unsatisfying vaping setup, device malfunction, or a lack of access to vape supplies can trigger a smoking relapse," Dr. Ward pointed out. "But support from vape shops can help sustain smoking abstinence. We found that shop assistants trouble shoot with customers if they had relapsed and try and find a solution, such as fixing their device or upping their nicotine strength."

Social support

The research team also studied the vape shop environment and found that they offer an opportunity to socialise and reinforce vaping as an "identity".

"Because they are now commonplace on the high street, they're really accessible," said Dr. Ward. "Many of the shops market themselves as places for socialising and relaxing with a 'café' feel interior."

The study shows that this sort of informal atmosphere can appeal to those who enjoyed the social aspect of smoking. However, vape shops were seen as largely masculine territories.

"Some of the women we spoke to said they didn't feel confident in vape shops, and said that their male partner or a colleague would visit the shops on their behalf," according to the doctor. "We also saw that men would come in to buy products or ask for advice on behalf of absent female partners."

The study concludes that health professionals could capitalise on the success of vape shops by working in partnership to ensure the best outcomes for patients.

"Health professionals should consider engaging with the local vaping community to avoid referring clients to shops offering poor customer service or inappropriate sales driven advice. Likewise smoking cessation training for shops could be beneficial," said Dr. Caitlin Notley, a Society for the Study of Addiction Research Fellow at UEA's Norwich Medical School and principal investigator of the study.

The Public Health England evidence update released on 6 February states that "there is compelling evidence that e-cigarettes be made available to NHS patients." Based on the UEA study, not all ex-smokers wanted a medical route to quitting smoking by vaping, but for some people trying

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an e-cigarette on prescription may be a good introduction. Particularly for those who cannot afford to purchase a start-up kit initially, having a prescription could be very important, according to Dr. Notley.

The study recommends that future research should evaluate joint working between Stop Smoking Services and vape shops to help smokers achieve and maintain smoking cessation.

Source: [University of East Anglia](#)

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