

## Inside

### Page 2

Embrace THR for ending combustible smoking

### Page

Combating misguided hostility against harm reduction and vaping  
Stare at smokers to stop them, Hong Kong health chief urges public

### Page 4

Four in ten smokers wrongly believe vaping is as or more harmful as smoking: ASH survey

## Most doctors worldwide mistakenly believe nicotine causes lung cancer

Nearly 80% of doctors worldwide mistakenly believe nicotine causes lung cancer, thwarting efforts to hold one billion smokers quit, according to a survey conducted in 11 countries. The survey of 15000 doctors in 11 countries – China, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, South Africa, UK, and the US – has been conducted by Sermo and funded by the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. The survey is aimed at developing actionable insights for accelerating an end to smoking. Sermo is an independent platform and leader in actionable healthcare professional insights.

The physicians surveyed are full time, licensed to practice, with a minimum of two years' experience, who spend at least 50% of their time in direct patient care, seeing a minimum of 20 adult patients per month. They work in a broad range of specialties from family/general practice to internal medicine, cardiology, pulmonology, oncology, and psychiatry.

According to the survey, a significant majority of doctors worldwide mistakenly

attributes negative health consequences of smoking to nicotine. Of them, 78% think nicotine causes atherosclerosis, while 77% said it causes lung cancer, followed 76% who hold nicotine responsible for COPD, 72% birth defects, 71% head/neck gastric cancers, and 69% bladder cancer.

Even though 78% of physicians at least moderately agreed with the statement that "In adult patients, most harm caused by smoking comes from combustion rather than nicotine itself," when specifically asked, an average of 73% of doctors at least moderately agree that nicotine causes lung, bladder, and head/neck/gastric cancer.

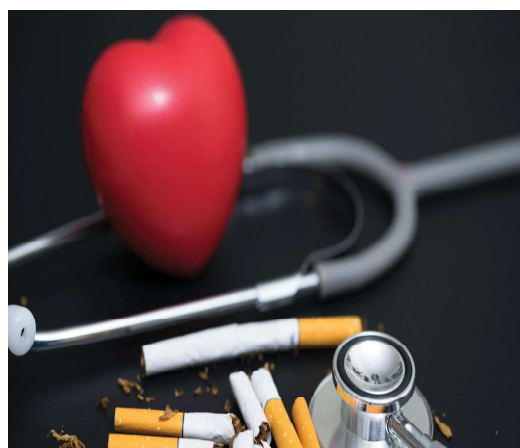
In nearly all 11 countries surveyed, a large majority of physicians are interested in training about smoking reduction/cessation. However, many tend to focus on general cessation rather than specific alternatives to smoking.

In all countries a large majority of physicians – ranging from 71% to 94% - agree that helping patients quit smoking is a priority. On average, one fourth of physicians report never having participated in training about smoking cessation. Lack

of opportunity and lack of awareness are the most common reasons for not taking training. In nearly all countries, at least 80% of physicians are interested in training about smoking reduction/cessation, though reported interest does not always match real-world participation.

In Pakistan also, an overwhelming majority of doctors mistakenly believes nicotine is carcinogenic. In a survey conducted by the Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) in 2022, more than two-thirds of doctors (70%) strongly agreed and 17.9% somewhat agreed with the statement that nicotine causes cancer. Almost 80%

doctors strongly agreed with the statement that nicotine causes cardiovascular disease while 81.6% held it responsible for COPD. Similarly, 61.7% strongly agreed that nicotine causes birth defects. Majority of doctors who had specific smoking cessation training strongly agreed that nicotine contributed to cancer (73.2%), cardiovascular disease (82.1%), birth defects (64.3%) and COPD (89.3%), respectively. Similarly, doctors with no specific smoking cessation training also strongly agreed that nicotine contributed to cancer (69.4%), cardio-vascular disease (79.4%), birth defects (61.2%), and COPD (80.1%).



# Embrace THR for ending combustible smoking

By Junaid Ali Khan

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its fresh report has acknowledged that Brazil, Mauritius, the Netherlands and Turkiye have adopted all the measures recommended in the fight against smoking. No doubt, the measures taken by the above-mentioned countries are in the right direction. However, like most of the countries, they are still far away from achieving a smoke-free future though. In light of this, the need for a comprehensive approach with emphasis on the tobacco harm reduction strategies is crucial but it is so unfortunate that the WHO has adopted a prohibitionist approach towards the alternative products especially electronic cigarettes and this is one of the biggest challenges in the fight against smoking.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) has been ratified by 180 countries worldwide but still smoking is the leading cause of preventable deaths. According to the WHO, smoking kills 8.7 million people each year, including 1.3m who die from second-hand smoke. Despite measures taken out in the past two decade, for instance, Pakistan has witnessed an increase in the smoking ratio. According to some estimates, there are more than 31m tobacco users in Pakistan.

Smoking cessation is a weak link in the tobacco control efforts in Pakistan. In 2017, Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) made part of the essential drugs list but they (NRTs) are expensive and not easily available. There is a lack of regulations for the use of e-cigarette and other less-harmful alternatives. They are also expensive and only available in the big cities of the country. According to a survey, conducted by



## Initiatives to achieve a smoke-free Pakistan

- Smoking cessation services should be affordable and accessible across Pakistan.
- Smokers' views and demands should be part of the tobacco control efforts.
- Tobacco harm reduction should be part of the national tobacco control policy and the THR products should be sensibly regulated.
- Create smoke-free environments with the help of communities.
- Making tobacco control part of the health services.

the Alternative Research Initiative (ARI), more than 70 percent of the doctors wrongly believe that nicotine causes cancer. In the tobacco control efforts, the most important stakeholder – smokers - have never been asked that what kind of help they need in order to quit smoking. Further, there is only one cessation clinic in Islamabad. Therefore, less than 3% of the smokers successfully quit smoking in a year. On the other hand, we have a success story of Sweden, the country that has successfully dropped down the smoking ratio to 5.6% by adopting alternatives and is now on course to achieve the status of a world's first smoke free country by further dropping the smoking prevalence ratio below 5 percent. In Sweden, England and other developed countries smokers are encouraged to use alternatives – Snus, nicotine pouches and vapes as they have the potential to help people in giving up smoking.

It is scientifically proven that they are less harmful and can be used as an effective cessation tool. Instead of calling for bans, it would be better to understand the concept of tobacco harm reduction and embrace the alternatives for achieving a smoke-free future.

A smoke-free Pakistan is possible to achieve. For this, the government should ensure the tobacco harm reduction is made part of the national tobacco control policy, effective cessation services are accessible and affordable with the sensible regulations of the innovative tobacco harm products in the country.

## Does nicotine cause cancer?

No. Nicotine is a common chemical compound found in tobacco plants, and its effect is to make tobacco addictive rather than to cause cancer directly. People who are addicted are more likely to continue to expose themselves to the carcinogens in smoked or smokeless tobacco.

Nicotine at doses found in products such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) can gradually replace the need for nicotine in cigarette smokers while minimizing the exposure of users to the carcinogens and other toxic substances in tobacco smoke. Medicinal nicotine is therefore a safer alternative to tobacco products. Nicotine replacement therapy (as gum and patch) is on the World Health Organization list of essential medicines since 2009.

Nicotine in very large doses can be toxic or even lethal and therefore nicotine products should be kept out of the reach of children.

(Source: International Agency for Research on Cancer)

# Combating misguided hostility against harm reduction and vaping

By Michael Landl

In recent years, the topic of harm reduction and vaping has been surrounded by an unwarranted air of hostility. The World Health Organization (WHO) and its Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, have again taken a stance against vaping in their latest "Report on the global tobacco epidemic, 2023." Unfortunately, this approach is misguided and ultimately detrimental to the goal of improving public health worldwide.

Let us be clear – the primary objective should be to reduce smoking rates and curb the devastating effects of tobacco consumption. However, the WHO continues to misdirect its energy toward attacking vaping, one of the most successful tools for smoking cessation.

In response to the WHO's recent report, it is evident that the direction is riddled with biased anti-vaping scaremongering and unfounded claims. The WHO's negative obsession with vaping ignores that countries with an open and consumer-friendly approach to harm-reduction products have achieved more promising results in reducing smoking rates. Let's consider some key arguments for why this hostility against harm reduction and vaping ultimately hurts public health:

## 1. Evidence-Based Harm Reduction:

Vaping has consistently demonstrated its potential as an effective harm reduction tool. Research indicates that vaping is approximately 95% less harmful than smoking, making it a safer alternative for smokers seeking to quit. The WHO disregards a vital opportunity to improve public health outcomes by dismissing the evidence in favour of harm reduction.

## 2. Gateway Effect Misconception:

The WHO report perpetuates the unfounded notion of a gateway effect from vaping to smoking, especially among young people. However, numerous studies have debunked this claim. Factors such as anxiety, parental smoking habits, peer attitudes, and household income are more influential in determining behaviour. Ignoring the complexities and spreading misinformation does a disservice to the public.

## 3. Flavours and Adult Vapers:

Flavours are an essential aspect of vaping for adults, as they

play a significant role in transitioning smokers away from cigarettes. The WHO's stance against flavours disregards the preferences and experiences of millions of vapers. Denying adults, a variety of flavours hinders their efforts to quit smoking and maintain the less harmful habit.

## 4. Comparative Success Stories:

Countries like Sweden and the United Kingdom, with progressive harm reduction policies embracing vaping, have successfully reduced smoking rates. Their positive outcomes contrast sharply with countries following WHO's restrictive approach. Embracing evidence-based harm reduction measures can foster a more significant reduction in smoking rates globally.

## 5. Focus on Real Issues:

The WHO should address real issues, such as enforcing age restrictions to prevent minors from accessing vaping products and improving tobacco control efforts. Harping on vaping detracts from the primary goal of reducing smoking rates and addressing critical public health challenges. The WHO's hostility towards vaping undermines the opportunity to leverage harm reduction strategies for better public health outcomes. While we agree that protecting minors from tobacco and vaping products is vital, it is equally essential to recognize the potential benefits of vaping for adult smokers looking to quit. Vaping is a powerful tool that has helped millions of smokers' transition from combustion cigarettes to vaping. The WHO fails to support smokers' journey towards a healthier lifestyle by dismissing its potential.

The reality is that harm reduction, based on scientific evidence and supported by consumer input, should play a pivotal role in reducing smoking rates and improving public health. A holistic approach that combines tobacco harm reduction measures, strict regulations to prevent youth access, and robust support for smokers to quit can lead to tangible progress.

It is time for the WHO and global health institutions to set aside unwarranted hostility and embrace harm reduction as a viable and practical approach to tackling the smoking epidemic.

[https://worldvapersalliance.com/combating-misguided-hostility-against-harm-reduction-vaping/?fbclid=IwAR0\\_3d51nSPPm2bb3LV5QbyP4U0E-tHgYlFhTOve5D-rjA6y9YHkBgBOI](https://worldvapersalliance.com/combating-misguided-hostility-against-harm-reduction-vaping/?fbclid=IwAR0_3d51nSPPm2bb3LV5QbyP4U0E-tHgYlFhTOve5D-rjA6y9YHkBgBOI)

## Stare at smokers to stop them, Hong Kong health chief urges public

People in Hong Kong should discourage smoking by staring at anyone who lights up in areas where it is banned, the city's health secretary has suggested. Answering questions about how to create a tobacco-free city, Lo Chung-mau also said police could not be expected to catch smokers. Hong Kong is currently debating toughening its anti-tobacco measures.

Current rules ban smoking inside restaurants, workplaces, indoor public spaces and some outdoor public areas.

After launching a public consultation to reduce smoking in Hong Kong, Prof Lo told fellow lawmakers at a health meeting that the public had a role to play in reducing smoking and that it would be challenging for police officers to catch smokers in the act in time. Prof Lo, who is also a medical doctor, said smoking was bad for the health of everyone and Hong Kong needed a "culture in society that people are willing to comply with the law".

He added: "When the members of the public see people smoking in non-smoking areas, even if no law enforcement officers can show up immediately, we can stare at the smokers." But he also said when police "arrive at the scene, the crime may have already stopped" and so they are unable to take action, going on to suggest smoking rules should be enforced like etiquette over waiting for a bus.

Among the new measures being considered by Hong Kong's government are banning people born after a certain year from buying tobacco products and significantly increasing the tax on a packet of cigarettes.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-66206511>

# Four in ten smokers wrongly believe vaping is as or more harmful as smoking: ASH survey

The latest ASH annual survey has revealed that four in ten smokers (39%) in Great Britain now believe vaping is as or riskier compared with smoking up from a third last year; 1.8 million smokers (27%) have never tried vaping even though it's a very effective quitting aid while 2.9 million smokers have tried vaping but stopped.

Earlier this year the government announced a national 'swap to stop' campaign to offer 1 million smokers a free vaping starter kit together with behavioural support, to help them quit smoking. Vaping combined with behavioural support is nearly twice as effective as medicinal nicotine replacement therapy, so this evidence-based strategy could play a significant role in delivering the government's smokefree 2030 ambition.

However, the success of 'swap to stop' is threatened by growing concerns among smokers that vaping is as or riskier than smoking.

Among the 1.8 million smokers who are yet to try vaping 43% believe e-cigarettes are as harmful or more than smoking up from 27% in 2019. Among the 2.9 million smokers who have tried vaping but stopped, 44% believe vaping is as harmful or more than smoking up from 25% in 2019. The most accurate risk perceptions are among the 2.7 million ex-smokers who vape and 2.9 million ex-smokers who are ex-vapers, 75% and 45% of whom correctly believe that vaping is less harmful than smoking.

Hazel Cheeseman, Deputy Chief Executive of ASH said: "The Government has backed a vaping strategy as its path to reduce rates of smoking, but this approach will be undermined if smokers don't try vapes due to safety fears or stop vaping too soon and revert to smoking. The government must act quickly to improve public understanding that vaping poses a fraction of the risk of smoking."

Dr Ruth Sharrock, Clinical Lead for Tobacco Dependency, North East and North Cumbria NHS Integrated Care Board added that vaping was an important tool to support smokers to quit:

"When I see patients who smoke they are already sick with smoking-related disease and have often given up hope of ever stopping. Vaping is a valuable tool in our armoury to tackle smoking, particularly for patients who are heavily

addicted. However, too many of my patients have seen alarmist media headlines that worry them and put them off giving vaping a go."

Alongside the 2023 data on adult vaping ASH is publishing a 'myth buster' challenging common misrepresentations of the evidence on vaping. This has been developed with the country's leading experts on smoking and vaping and provides evidence that:

- Vaping is NOT more harmful than smoking
- Vaping is NOT more addictive than smoking
- Vaping is NOT a proven gateway into smoking
- Nicotine DOES NOT damage young people's brain development

Professor Ann McNeill, King's College London, author of Government commissioned review on the harms from vaping and contributor to the ASH myth buster, commented: "Anxiety over youth vaping is obscuring the fact that switching from smoking to vaping will be much better for an individual's health. It is wrong to say we have no idea what the future risks from vaping will be. On the contrary levels of exposure to cancer causing and other toxicants are drastically lower in people who vape compared with those who smoke, which indicates that any risks to health are likely to be a fraction of those posed by smoking."

"We must not be complacent about youth vaping and further regulation is needed, but so too is work to ensure many more adults stop smoking and vaping is an effective means of doing that."

Commenting on whether communicating more accurate perceptions of vaping would further fuel youth vaping Ms Cheeseman added:

"It's not because they think it's safe that teenagers are experimenting with vaping. Harm perceptions are even more inaccurate among teens than the adult population. They are vaping because products appeal to them and are cheap and easily accessible. Further regulation will be more effective than scare mongering. Worse, if teenagers who experiment with vaping think that smoking is just as bad, then there is a risk they may be more likely to smoke."

<https://ash.org.uk/media-centre/news/press-releases/-four-in-ten-smokers-wrongly-believe-that-vaping-is-as-or-more-harmful-as-smoking>



Established in 2018, ARI is an initiative aimed at filling gaps in research and advocacy on ending combustible smoking in a generation. Supported by the Foundation for A Smoke-Free World (FSFW), ARI established the Pakistan Alliance for Nicotine and Tobacco Harm Reduction (PANTHR) in 2019 to promote innovative solutions for smoking cessation.

To know more about us, please visit: [www.aripk.com](http://www.aripk.com) and [www.panthr.org](http://www.panthr.org)

Follow us on [www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/](https://www.facebook.com/ari.panthr/) | [https://twitter.com/ARI\\_PANTHR](https://twitter.com/ARI_PANTHR) | <https://instagram.com/ari.panthr>

Islamabad, Pakistan | Email: [info@aripk.com](mailto:info@aripk.com)