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Call for greater role for health professionals in tobacco control efforts

BAHAWALPUR: Pakistan needs to make tobacco harm reduction (THR) part of the national tobacco control policy and enhance health practitioners' engagement in cessation efforts to reduce smoking prevalence.

This was agreed at a consultation meeting, organized by Alternative Research Initiative (ARI), on the role of THR and health practitioners in ending combustible smoking from Pakistan.

The participants were informed about the heavy burden of disease because of the combustible smoking in Pakistan, with nearly 29 million tobacco users in the country. Some estimates say the number of tobacco users has reached 31 million. The total economic cost of smoking was Rs 615.07 billion (US\$3.85 billion), in 2019, equal to 1.6% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The consultation was told that almost all of the smoking-related risk arises from the smoke: the particles of tar and toxic gases that are inhaled from burning tobacco. If smokers can find satisfactory alternatives to cigarettes that do not involve combustion but do provide nicotine, then they would avoid almost all of the disease risk.

Inhaling a burning cigarette remains the riskiest use of nicotine, as it releases tar and gases containing thousands of toxins. These are potentially dangerous for human health, and in some cases fatal.

The speakers regretted lack of national policy on tobacco control, and added that the smokers' concerns have been ignored. Smokers in Pakistan do not consult medical practitioners when it comes to quitting smoking. If they decide to give up smoking, they don't know where they should seek assistance. Due to lack of the effective cessation services, less than 3% of the smokers successfully quit smoking in a year across Pakistan.



They said that role of the medical practitioners in fight against smoking is a missing link. For making smoking cessation services effective, health practitioners must be engaged in tobacco control efforts. Their engagement in tobacco control efforts and awareness about THR would help in ending and reducing the ratio of combustible smoking in Pakistan.

The speakers said that a smoke-free Pakistan is possible to achieve before 2030. However, for achieving this target, the government should ensure provision of effective, accessible and affordable cessation services and make tobacco harm reduction part of the national tobacco control policy. They called for sensibly regulating innovative tobacco harm reduction products in Pakistan. They also called for engaging health practitioners in cessation efforts and making smokers part of the tobacco control efforts to achieve a smoke-free future.

Vaping facts for health professionals

BRUSSELS: 700,000 people in the EU die each year as a result of smoking and every second smoker dies 14 years prematurely. Switching to vaping has helped millions of smokers worldwide to significantly reduce the harm to their health. The principle of harm reduction works, and millions more smokers could benefit from it. But for it to really change society, smokers need the facts and that starts with health-care professionals.

Three experts from King's College London and the public health charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) have recently addressed health professionals, focusing on "myths about e-cigarettes and vaping".

"E-cigarettes (vapes) are currently the most popular aid used to quit smoking in England and are used by around 4.3 million adults in Great Britain, the majority of whom are ex-smokers," the authors state, emphasizing that "... vaping poses only a small fraction of the health risks of smoking and that smokers should be encouraged to use vaping products ... for stopping." The experts fear that myths about vaping "risk undermining the use of these products as cessation aids."

IEVA president Dustin Dahlmann agrees: "The facts about harm reduction are on the table. If many more smokers who cannot quit by other means were to switch to e-cigarettes, millions of people worldwide could live better and longer lives. Health policy in the UK should be a shining example to all policy makers."

The UK government advises that vaping is at least 95 percent less harmful than smoking. The risk of developing cancer is considered to be 99.5 percent lower for vapers than for smokers. These findings have been substantiated in multiple publications over recent years. But too many smokers misjudge the comparative harm of vaping. Only 28 percent of smokers in Europe know that vaping is less harmful than smoking.

"It is critical that smokers are given the facts about harm reduction. Health professionals have responsibility as clinicians in direct contact with people who want to quit smoking," says Dustin Dahlmann.

<https://www.vapingpost.com/2023/03/16/health-profession-als-should-know-the-vaping-facts/?fbclid=IwAR25sFIUx2aygCdGfGXbfJy16yJyp2b3kJH Mxu-qghzBuDATs1mkbtkHcbA>

Study finds no link between vaping and cardiovascular disease

A new study analysing data from the Population Assessment of Tobacco & Health (PATH) study, found no link between exclusive ENDS (electronic nicotine delivery systems) use and an increased risk for cardiovascular diseases.

Titled, "Longitudinal associations between exclusive and dual use of electronic nicotine delivery systems and cigarettes and self-reported incident diagnosed cardiovascular disease among adults," the current study analyzed waves 1-5 of the PATH Study (2013-2019). The research team looked for the risk of self-reported incident diagnosed myocardial infarction (MI; 280 incident cases) and stroke (186 incident cases) and any possible associations with ENDS and/or cigarette use among adults aged 40+.

The compiled data found that compared to no cigarette or ENDS use, exclusive cigarette use increased the risk of MI and stroke, while exclusive ENDS use and even dual use of ENDS and cigarettes was not.

"Compared to non-use, exclusive cigarette use was associated with an increased risk of self-reported incident diagnosed cardiovascular disease over a five-year period, while ENDS use was not associated with a statistically significant increase in the outcomes," concluded the researchers.

Switching from smoking to smokeless tobacco

Similarly, another recent study in the journal *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, highlighted the relative safety of smokeless tobacco products and how switching to the products from combustible cigarettes was associated with lower cardiovascular disease risk in smokers.

The study, "Associations of Smokeless Tobacco Use with Cardiovascular Disease Risk: Insights from the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health Study" was conducted by a team of researchers from UCLA, UC San Francisco, Boston University and the University of Texas at Arlington.

The researchers analyzed data from a nationally representa-



tive group of 4,347 adults who provided urine and blood samples in 2013-14 as part of the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study. Among this group, 3,034 participants used cigarettes exclusively, 338 used only smokeless tobacco, and 975 had never used any tobacco product.

The research team found that despite similar nicotine levels, smokeless tobacco users displayed significantly lower biomarkers of disease. "Our findings show that despite having higher levels of nicotine, exclusive smokeless tobacco users had significantly lower concentrations of inflammation and oxidative stress biomarkers than cigarette smokers. Levels of these biomarkers among smokeless tobacco users were similar to those of 'never' smokers," said lead study author Mary Rezk-Hanna, who is an assistant professor at UCLA School of Nursing.

<https://www.vapingpost.com/2023/03/29/study-finds-no-link-between-vaping-and-cardiovascular-disease/?fbclid=IwAR0yM8DVZQiofcShZ2HUvABmiu99W9Pa0U2biDMGaHPR7qsEaudEdvZCYyo>

Sweden likely to become a smoke-free country this year

STOCKHOLM--(BUSINESS WIRE) – Swedish authorities officially confirmed that the current level of smoking in Sweden has fallen to 5.6%. This makes Swedes the only European nation close to reaching the smoke-free goal set by the EU 18 years ahead of the 2040 target.

In an event organised by the Oral Nicotine Commission in Stockholm, participants took stock of Sweden's incredible achievements and leadership in the race to end smoking. It is about to become the first country in the world to be defined as "smoke free", representing a share of less than 5% of the population smoking.

Sweden's smoking rates have shot down since the 1980s from 35% down to below 6% - a feat that is yet to be replicated by any other nation in the world. The next lowest smoking rate in Europe is double that of Sweden's, with the EU average sitting somewhere around 23%, four times higher than in Sweden. The result is the lowest tobacco mortality rate in Europe.

A group of leading public health professionals, consumer advocates and harm reduction experts that met to celebrate the achievement on 30 November 2022 in Stockholm have reaffirmed their call to policymakers around the world to ensure that less harmful alternatives to smoking are available to support smokers to quit.

Commenting at the event, Dr. Delon Human, President of Health Diplomats and organiser of the event in Stockholm said: "If all smokers in the world, some 1.1 billion people, would switch to one of less harmful alternative smoke-free, nicotine-based products, it could prevent disease and save millions of lives worldwide. Sweden has found the fire-escape for smokers. We need to work together to repeat the Swedish experience globally to save lives."

This incredible success story gave attendees the chance to better understand Sweden's recipe to success, key to which is its openness to less harmful alternatives to smoking. Snus has been at the forefront of the reduction measures, but in recent years, nicotine pouches and e-cigarettes have become another valuable tool for Swedish smokers aiming to quit. The progressive, pro harm-reduction Swedish model is clearly distinct from the policies proposed by international organisations in favour of tobacco control. At an EU level, harm reduction advocates have fought hard to have harm reduction recognised in the European Beating Cancer Plan. The WHO still refuses to acknowledge its value, despite the fact that harm reduction is explicitly recognised in the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control.

Commenting at the event, Professor Karl Fagerström said: "The upcoming Swedish EU presidency is a great opportunity to share their 5% success story to other EU countries. We hope that Sweden will be generous with sharing this know-how internationally."

Speakers at the conference emphasised the need for sound evidence-based policy interventions in tobacco control. This translates to the broad adoption of tobacco harm reduction policies that support a journey to quitting smoking. Ensuring that less harmful alternatives to smoking are affordable, accessible and affordable will be paramount to ensure that other countries can replicate Sweden's success. This event is the start of much needed discussion of this topic.

The Oral Nicotine Commission is a global not-for-profit

association that helps build the evidence base and raise awareness of Oral Nicotine among both governments, public health leaders and the public, thus countering negative, unfounded preconceptions and stereotypes. It addresses policy, science, consumer issues and relevant product innovations. Its views are independent of any brand or manufacturer and focuses on the individual and population health needs of adult smokers.

<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20221205005671/en/Sweden-Achieves-the-Lowest-Smoking-Rate-in-Europe-and-is-on-Track-to-Become-Officially-Smoke-Free--The-EU-Must-Take-Note?fbclid=IwAR2qy1Zt-HrV6s1-9ATOpC8uDAU0xcNMMMgllv865sXRpEEgQBIFDHcgy>

Make vapes a pharmacy-only drug, say New Zealand health groups

New Zealand public health researchers and doctors are calling for vapes to be made pharmacy- or prescription-only, as teen vaping rises sharply.

While the number of people smoking cigarettes in New Zealand has dropped to record lows, those taking up vaping – particularly teenagers – has soared, with youth vaping more than tripling between 2019 and 2021. Now some doctors' groups are pushing for New Zealand to follow in Australia's footsteps, where vapes have been made a prescription-only drug.

Dr Bryan Betty, medical director of Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners, said the college was advocating for vapes to be made available only through pharmacies and doctor's offices.

Vaping was "very, very valuable as a smoking cessation tool, and we are incredibly supportive of it being used in that way", Betty said, but doctors were highly concerned about young people who had never smoked taking up vaping. According to data released last year, New Zealand's smoking prevalence had dropped to 8% – one of the lowest in the world – but the rise in daily vape users was larger than the drop in daily smokers. It found 8.3% of adults were vaping daily, up from 6.2% in the previous year. The rise was particularly marked in young people: the number of year 10 students – about 14 years old – who vaped daily had risen from 3.1% in 2019 to 9.6% in 2021.

The government is now reviewing its vaping regulations. In January, associate health minister Ayesha Verrall said the government was opening a consultation on revamping vaping laws, saying "youth vaping rates are too high" and the government "needs to strike a better balance".

The government's proposed changes, however, have focused on restricting the sales of vapes to some premises, reducing the level of nicotine, and changing packaging, rather than shifting to a pharmacy- or prescription-only model.

"Making things prescription-only will shut down that easy access, will make enforcement a lot easier and should ensure that the products get into the right people's hands for the right reasons," she said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/05/make-vapes-a-pharmacy-only-drug-new-zealand-health-groups-vaping-nzfbclid=IwAR0qubD49htEFUakFkn5BPSidVQoeTuFDvncvEUSiOLOCOePGatKrlcAc4Y>

Call for establishing regulations for vape products in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR: The Malaysian Society for Harm Reduction (MSHR) urged the government to establish regulations for vape products to assist in reducing the prevalence of smoking in Malaysia.

It was reported last week that the Poisons Board are meeting to discuss the potential exemption of vape liquids or gel containing nicotine from the Poisons Act 1952, a step needed to enable regulations to be introduced onto vape products.

The health minister has also stated that the ministry is expediting the tobacco bill to be tabled in the Parliament soon.

MSHR chairman Professor Dr Sharifa Ezat Wan Puteh said this is signalling that the Ministry of Health (MoH) is taking steps to regulate vape products which is a step in the right direction.

"The current situation where vape products are unregulated cannot be left unattended and needs to be addressed immediately.

"While waiting for the tobacco bill to be tabled in Parliament, MSHR believes immediate amendments to current regulations need to take place to enable controls to be imposed onto vape products.

"MSHR urge all parties to support this move so that the government can take steps to regulate vape products

immediately to protect consumers from prohibited ingredients, prevent potential contaminations from open system products and prohibit products from falling into minors' hands," said Dr Sharifa, who is also a community health physician and health economics specialist from the faculty of medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

At the same time, MSHR is also urging the government to develop regulations that will take into consideration the harm reduction potential of vape products.

"Multiple independent data from local and international research show that vape has been proven to be less harmful compared to smoking and is effective in assisting smokers to quit smoking.

"These independent researches have also been acknowledged by the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand governments are spearheading the tobacco harm reduction agenda.

"Therefore, in developing the regulations for vape products, the health ministry needs to consider the harm reduction potential for vape products and introduce appropriate regulations to regulate the products instead of categorizing them in the same way as cigarettes," Dr Sharifa said.

https://www.nst.com.my/business/2023/03/894924/establish-regulations-vape-products-reduce-tobaccosmokingsaysmsmr?fbclid=IwAR0duHzFmVzRBCbBaqFzptrKG61Y5FVDgkQnGkByuBuPsJ_koNk15W01k

Science is winning the contest against cigarettes

Like most of the world, Pakistan is also currently faced with the worrying challenge of cigarette smoking. Many countries have taken innovative actions to curb the use of cigarettes by introducing regulatory measures that encourage smokers to make better choices, like the introduction of technologically-improved alternatives to smoking.

Today, a wide variety of products are available in the market for adults to choose from, like nicotine pouches, E-Cigarettes, vapes, and heated tobacco products. Designed as a stepping stone towards a future without cigarettes, these innovative products offer enormous potential when it comes to guiding cigarette consumers towards making better, healthier choices. Modern science and research are already providing valuable evidence of the effectiveness of smoking alternatives. Observations in some Asian countries, where smoke-free products have been introduced, also lend support to this. These alternatives, coupled with the right regulatory measures, hold the potential to significantly reduce the nation's 24 million adult smokers. With the recent regulatory developments in Pakistan, there is a significant opportunity to follow in the footsteps of other countries' success and put an end to cigarettes altogether.

As the single greatest preventable cause of death in the world today, smoking claims seven million lives every year. However,



thanks to scientific advancement, it is now possible to choose a less harmful path that is designed to lead to a completely smoke-free life. Now is the time to accept change and bid farewell to cigarettes, once and for all.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/03/07/science-is-winning-the-contest-against-cigarettes/?fbclid=IwAR27X8vGPT9KJTLFgRCYwjugWJT852qi1Adwx1saCeJXEu0RrREuFmOYryY>

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.

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