

Let's talk e-cigarettes, May 2024

## Transcript

Let's talk e-cigarettes

Podcast 33, June 2024, Louise Ross, NCSCT, National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training.

Speaker 2: Nicola Lindson, NL

Speaker 3: Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, JHB

Speaker 4: Louise Ross

Musical intro

If asking your mate down the pub about vaping is what they probably say, no one agrees if it's safer or not, so you might as well smoke anyway. Now what your mate needs is a Cochrane review. All the facts have been checked at least twice. They find there's a lot that the experts agree on and might give you different advice.

Speaker 2

Hi, my name is Nicola and I'm a researcher based at the University of Oxford in the UK.

Speaker 3

And I'm Jamie and I'm a researcher based at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the United States.

Speaker 2

We are both members of the Cochrane Tobacco Addiction Group. Welcome to this edition of Let's talk E cigarettes. This podcast is a companion to a research project being carried out at the University of Oxford, where every month we research the e-cigarette research literature to find new studies. We then use these studies to update our Cochrane Systematic review of E cigarettes for smoking cessation. This is called a living systematic review. In each episode, we start by going through the studies we've found that month and then go into more detail about a particular study or topic related to E cigarettes.

Speaker 3

This month we ran our searches on the 1st of June 2024. We found one paper linked to a study that we'd already included. We didn't find any new included studies or new ongoing studies this month. So for this month's deep dive. I had the pleasure of speaking with Louise Ross, who consults for the National Center for Smoking Cessation and Training in the UK, about some new work that they're developing, and I will let Louise tell you all about it.

Well, Louise, thank you so much for coming on first off, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what got you into working in the area of vaping?

Speaker 4

Thank you. Yes. So, I'm Louise Ross and I've worked in smoking cessation for over 20 years now. I used to manage to stop smoking service and in fact, it was the first vape friendly service in the world I guess. We kicked it all off before there was any evidence

about this. We just had a, or I just had a, gut feeling that this was the right way to go. And and in fact, you know, history has proved us right and I now work for the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training. But I'm also part of the senior team on the Smoke Free App, which is a digital service for helping people stop smoking and we're worldwide.

Speaker 3

Ohh, fantastic. And so, for our international listeners, can you tell us a little bit about NCSCT? What do you all do? What's your mission? How does it all go?

Speaker 4

Sure. Yes. So NCSCT is a social enterprise. And what we do is help support tobacco dependency services and of course, tobacco dependency is now wider than just smoking cessation. So it encompasses much more than just straight stop smoking services. But you know we provide training, assessment, policy, interventions guidance and you know that can be to organizations or to individuals and it's a small team but we're passionate about what we do and and one of the things that I've been involved with is the creation of training videos. I did the one on homelessness that people can have a look at if they choose to, and more recently the swap to stop training, and it's been very exciting to put that together in a way that's easy to understand for not just people who are in the smoking cessation profession, but frontline workers who work with people from disadvantaged communities who want to know more about how they can raise the subject of smoking.

Speaker 3

Brilliant and and just to confirm, even for international listeners, if they were to Google and NCSCT homelessness they'd be able to access your guidance, even though they're based abroad is. Right.

Speaker 4

I believe so. I think they have to set up a training account and certainly if there's any problem with doing that then you know they they can get in touch with enquiries and and check out whether they actually are able to access that.

Speaker 3

OK. Brilliant. Alright. And another question just to kind of get us situated before we get into swap to stop what is the state of smoking cessation services in England so. If you were an individual who wanted to quit smoking and you were looking for support, where might you go?

Speaker 4

Well, we've got very evolved stop smoking services in the UK now, and I'm talking for England specifically. Most areas have got a local stop smoking service so people can go along to and to get individual tailored advice on stopping smoking. So that will be behavioural support and the stop smoking aid as well. Some people, if they happen to live in an area where that's not available, they can go to their general practitioner and get help to stop smoking and we've also got a growing field of digital support. So my

organisation supports people anywhere in the world, but particularly we're doing a lot of work in in England at the moment, to help people stop smoking and it because it's available 24/7, people don't have to actually have to go to a service to to get support. They can, you know, they've literally got support on their phone.

Speaker 3

That's really nice. Thank you. So what is the swap to stop scheme? It has a very catchy name, but what is it? What does it mean?

Speaker 4

People sometimes struggle to actually say it. Stop to stop. It can be a bit of a mouthful, but it's a it's a pioneering idea that that was created by this government to reach out to a million smokers. And so, a million people who smoke to be given the chance to switch from smoking, which we know, you know, will cause the the death of so many people who use cigarettes and long term disability and illness, you know, for the ones that don't die early. To get them to switch to a much, much less harmful vape. So that they'll be getting their nicotine without their harmful smoke. And the idea is that it doesn't have to be a qualified stop smoking practitioner that raises the subject of this it can be anybody working in frontline services. So for instance, debt management, LGBTQ organisations, homelessness, substance use, social housing, wherever there are people, teams working with more disadvantaged people who are more likely to smoke, they can raise the subject of swap to stop. And because they're linked in with the local stop smoking service they can organise for this free vape to be sent to to the person they're speaking to and give them the the the hope that this time could be the the time that they actually stop smoking for good.

Speaker 3

Awesome. And do you happen to know what types of e-cigarettes are going to be provided? Is it going to vary locality by locality?

Speaker 4

We're certainly not using disposables. We're using tank devices that have got a longer life and more environmentally friendly. There's a range of choices and they will come as the tank and an amount of e-liquid as well. So some areas are doing the the basic tank plus four weeks supply.

Speaker 3

OK.

Speaker 4

Other people are adding a bit of extra money to it so that people can have 12 weeks supply of their of their e-liquid. And and there will be a choice of strengths and flavours and so on, because we recognize that, you know, flavours are really important. People assume sometimes that tobacco flavour would be what they prefer because they were used to a cigarette. But we know that once people try a different flavour, particularly a fruit flavour, they're often sort of like away and ready to kind of carry on because they like it so much.

Speaker 3

Yeah, OK. So, tell me a bit about what we've heard is the excellent guidance NCSCT has developed to support people delivering this scheme. Is it for stop smoking advisors or really anyone in those frontline roles?

Speaker 4

It's the training that we produced is really aimed at the frontline services that aren't stop smoking specialists, although I would strongly recommend that the the Stop Smoking Service is watching as well because then they know what information has been given to these frontline services. So for instance you've got.

Speaker 3

Interesting.

Speaker 4

A debt manager team within social housing. They can watch it do the training and it only lasts, you know, bit over half an hour. So, it's very quick, very accessible, with a with a nice little video with service users talking about their transition from smoking to vaping and and I think that's a very, very powerful message and that's why I think stop smoking practitioners.

Speaker 3

Oh brilliant.

Speaker 4

Ought to look at the training as well because you know it's it's always good to hear real people talk about their particular journey.

Speaker 4

We love it, in, in our field.

Speaker 3

Excellent. So what would you say the key messages of this training are?

Speaker 4

The key messages are, I suppose it's really how to raise the subject because some of these frontline staff may feel nervous about doing it. They may think it's not their place to ask, they may be worried that because they're smokers themselves that, you know, maybe it's not the right thing to do it they say it makes them feel a bit hypocritical to be asking somebody else about their smoking if they smoke as well. But it's about how easy it can be, what the right questions to ask are. So you don't go charging and saying now, do you want to stop smoking? You ask about somebody smoking and then say. You know, interestingly enough, we've got a special offer on at the moment a free vape where with a bit of extra support, how interested would you be in that? Do you think that's something that would appeal to you and the training role models how to actually ask the question and what to do in circumstances where the person maybe is very

interested is a little bit interested or is not interested at all, and how you can move the conversation on to get people more interested because they may be resistant at first and then come round to the idea with the right encouragement.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Interesting. And does it also include education about e-cigarettes themselves, or is that something separate. How do how do people respond to that, I suppose if they're not normally trained in smoking cessation?

Speaker 4

I think one of the most important things is that we deal in the training with some of the myths that come up and I get it all the time, talking to people who want to stop smoking, they'll ask questions like well, surely it's just, you know, becoming addicted to something else. Or, I've heard that vapes are even worse than cigarettes. So, dealing with those sort of myths and also as part of the training resource we've got the wonderful Martin Dockrell talking about why the swap to stop scheme is such a good idea and he talks about meeting people where they are. Listening to what they want rather than telling them this is how you have to quit smoke. I think that tiny little insight amongst all the insights that he gives really encourages people to think this is about the way our service users, our colleagues, our friends might want to quit. Not you know that we're going to give them this prescriptive way of this is how you've got to do it.

Dog bark

Speaker 2

Martin Dockrell is the tobacco control program lead for the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, also known as OHID. Ohio is a British government unit that aims to improve public health policy.

Speaker 3

Is there anything else that you think are kind of core elements of the guidance that our listeners should know about and reflect on?

Speaker 4

I think one of the one of the things that that comes up regularly with both stop smoking practitioners and frontline workers who aren't specialist in in smoking cessation is, you know, how much they should use their vape. And I think there's three things to emphasize here and we try and bring it out in the film. Don't use the weakest possible liquid you know, use something that's strong enough to manage the withdrawal symptoms, because using a too weak.

Speaker 4

A liquid won't actually protect against wanting to pick up a cigarette, so that's one thing Martin Dockrell makes the point about using it every day. Don't be sparing with it. Use it as much as you need, just like you would with nicotine replacement therapy to control those urges to smoke. And don't stop too soon because that's the other thing that people worry about. How quickly can I stop vaping? Because they're alarmed at, you

know, the idea of of, you know, what the long-term risks might be. But we know that if people stop too soon, they're likely to go and pick up a cigarette.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 4

So keep going for as long as you feel you need to stay confident that you're not going to smoke again. So those would be my three top priority messages to get across to people when they watch the training.

Speaker 3

Great. Thank you. And is there anything else you'd like to add?

Speaker 4

Just to thank you for letting me talk on your lovely podcast.

Speaker 3

Oh. Thank you so much, Louise. We really appreciate it.

Speaker 2

It was really great to hear from Louise, Jamie, cause it just feels very different to the things that we usually talk about on the podcast and really takes what we've been learning about in kind of the research into a really practical setting and seeing how e-cigarettes are actually getting used in practice. So, I found that really, really useful. I think the kind of brief opportunistic advice that Louise was talking about is really interesting and I suppose disclaimer is that I'm doing quite a bit of research in this area at the moment so obviously I find it interesting, especially what she was talking about in getting people who aren't necessarily smoking cessation advisors or healthcare professionals to give out this kind of very brief opportunistic advice, we're seeing a bit more of and hopefully that will continue into the future. And it's obviously really important because actually then we can, you know, make contact with people who might not otherwise be going to their GP. They might not turn up at the the Stop Smoking services, they might not even know stop smoking services exist and yet they're getting this offer of an e-cigarette. And just by doing so, that might boost their motivation level certainly gives them an opportunity to do something about their smoking and we know that most people who smoke want to give up. And so if you may not have even thought about going to your GP about it or you may not have time because you're doing this, that and the other. If you're just offered a way to help you to quit, obviously that that could have a really positive impact. So, I think it was really great to hear about that. But you can understand how people who haven't done that kind of thing before might not know how to approach that. And having this training program is really important.

Speaker 3

It's absolutely critical just to give them the confidence to bring it up. As well. Yeah

Speaker 2

Hmm. And a group of us at University of Oxford have done a scoping review, looking at brief, opportunistic interventions giving to people in particular in financial advice services. Interestingly, what we saw in all the studies that we looked at was, in general, people were really happy for these other services to ask them about their smoking. To give them opportunities to quit smoking. So, again it might be something that we think ohh, you know, do people really want to be hearing about this when they're going somewhere about something completely different, you know, social housing or some debt advice or something like that. But actually what we're seeing is people do, in general, kind of welcome that opportunity to talk about this making and to get some help with it.

Speaker 3

It's really nice to hear because we know that brief opportunistic advice to help people stop smoking when given by healthcare providers absolutely works and it increases quit rates. But we know people struggle to see healthcare providers, and we also know that for various reasons, sometimes healthcare providers don't offer that advice even when they are instructed to do so, either because they're too busy or if they feel uncomfortable raising it or there's other things on their radar, so it's good to see that learning kind of spread out further.

Speaker 2

A really interesting study from UCLA recently that showed that cost was a really important motivator for people in giving up smoking. So. If smoking can be linked to well, actually, if you quit smoking, you could you wouldn't have this expense and therefore you could use that money for something else or save the money or use it to pay off debt. That could be a really good motivating factor for people.

Speaker 3

Absolutely, all right. Well, that is it from us this month. Thanks so much for listening. Thanks to Louise for sharing all of her knowledge with us and we look forward to speaking to you next month on Let's talk e-cigarettes. Please subscribe on iTunes or Spotify and stay tuned for. Our next episode.

Musical outro

Vaping is safer than smoking may help you quit in the end. But remember to mention the findings we have can't tell us what will happen long term, even though we know vaping is safer than smoking, we may still find cause for concern, if you're thinking about switching to vaping do it. That's what the experts agree. Smoking so bad for you they all concur that vaping beats burning there's much to learn of effect long term yet to be seen.

Speaker 3

Thank you to Jonathan Livingstone-Banks for running searches to Ailsa Butler for producing this podcast and to all of you for tuning. In music is written with Jonny Berliner and I and performed by Johnny. Our living systematic review is supported by funding from Cancer Research UK. The views expressed in this podcast are those of Nicola and I and do not represent those of the funders.

