Transcript

Let’s talk e-cigarettes

Podcast 38, January 2025, IQV review

Speaker 1: Musical intro & outro

Speaker 2: Nicola Lindson, NL

Speaker 3: Jamie Hartmann-Boyce, JHB

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 might give you different advice.

NL

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

JHB

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

NL

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-cigarrete 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.

JHB

Hello everyone and happy 2025. This month we are going to be updating you on results from both our December and January searches for our E cigarettes living systematic review. As we took December off from the podcast, so combining December and January searches, our searches are up to date as of the 1st of 2025. And we found three new studies in our searches over this period. We're going to tell you about those in a nutshell.

 The first is a preprint paper available on Med archive, currently led by Dimitra Kale and her team at University College London in the UK. They report the results of a randomized controlled feasibility trial, and 43 people who smoked and lived with a mental health condition. They were randomized to a usual care control or to an intervention in which participants were given an e-cigarette starter kit and a brief e-cigarette intervention. And the study followed up participants at one month, and they found the intervention was well received with no indication of serious side effects. They didn't find any statistically significant changes in mental health symptoms, but they did find that constipation, irritable feelings and restlessness were higher in the intervention than control group at one month. This was a relatively small. It was designed to see whether or not this was a feasible study design. So the next step we'll be exploring whether or not they roll this out in a larger trial. This study was funded by Yorkshire Cancer Research. I'll hand over to Nicola to tell you about the other two new studies in a nutshell.

NL

The 2nd paper we found reporting a new study was led by Doctor Pericot-Valverde at Clemson University in the US and published in the journal Nicotine and Tobacco Research. It was a single arm study, including thirty people with opioid use disorder on buprenorphine treatment. Participants were given a refillable e-cigarette and liquids with a choice of flavour alongside a brief training session. Participants were followed for eight weeks and of relevance to our review, carbon monoxide was measured. A reduction in carbon monoxide was found over the eight-week period. This study was funded by Clemson University and the Prisma Health Addiction Medicine Centre.

The 3rd and final new study we found was published in drug and alcohol dependence reports, and the first author was Doctor Sifat, based at the Thomas Jefferson University in the US and it was funded by Oklahoma Tobacco Settlement Endowment trust and Cancer Centre and the Sydney Kimmel cancer. It was a randomised controlled trial. However, only one arm of this study meets our eligibility criteria, and so we will treat it as a single arm study in our review. This study arm included 30 participants experiencing homelessness. Who were provided with a pod e-cigarette and additional pods and followed up to 8 weeks. Again, the outcome relevant to our review was carbon monoxide and this decreased between baseline and the eight-week follow up.

JHB

Thanks so much, Nicola. So in this months deep dive. We want to do something a little bit different, which is introduce you to our new Cochrane Systematic Review, which published at the beginning of this month. This is a new living systematic review focused on interventions for quitting vaping. Like our review of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation. It's also funded by Cancer Research UK. Moving forward, we'll be searching for new studies for that review every month as well, and updating whenever we find new studies on testing different ways to help people quit vaping. So, for this new review found nine studies, including over 5000. This is a pretty new area of research, so there are a bunch of ongoing studies here, but not really many that have been completed yet. The studies that we found tested nicotine replacement therapy, cytosine and varenicline, which are all medications that we know are effective for helping people stop smoking but that we don't know yet if they're effective for stopping vaping. It's also important to note that when it comes to pharmacotherapies for quitting smoking, we know there are harm profiles when they're used in people quitting smoking, and we know they're safe to use for that purpose. We're also interested in seeing what their harm profiles might look like in people using them to quit vaping. We're also interested in studies, testing behavioral interventions, and this time around we found two studies that tested a text message-based intervention for young people and a smaller study that was short term looking at a plan to help people reduce the nicotine in their vaping and reduce how much they vaped overall.

So, in terms of our main findings, we found some evidence that a text message-based intervention may help youth and young adults stop vaping nicotine. Both of these studies were just of the same program in young Americans, so we don't know yet whether we'd find the same results for other text message-based interventions or whether we'd find this result if this intervention was tested in other populations. We also found some evidence that the medicine varenicline might help people stop vaping at six months or longer, but that was just from one study, and we need more evidence there too. Overall, here the evidence is really still relatively uncertain That's not because of problems with the studies themselves necessarily, but just that this is a relatively new area of research, so we don't have that many studies yet. There wasn't enough information to say whether any of the other interventions that we looked at help people to stop vaping long term. There was some promising evidence from a shorter-term study of cytosine. Nicola, do you want to tell us a little bit about the ongoing studies that we found?

NL

Yes. So we found 20 ongoing studies and looking at quite a range of different interventions. So there is some on school and web-based lessons for example. More on varenicline, some on NRT. Also looking at things like smartphone apps, telephone-based support and video call-based support. And there's that's only some of them and there are more, and obviously, please go to the review to get more information. So there's quite a lot of new ongoing studies, but they're also exploring quite a wide range of different interventions. It'll be really exciting seeing those come through.

JHB

Absolutely. The other thing that we were happy about is that this review got quite a bit of media coverage, particularly here in the US and as a result, this meant that I've been engaging a little bit more with media coverage on the topic of quitting vaping and many people listening might be aware of this, but I did also want to flag that there are stories in the news that are coming out, like more frequently than I would expect around people who are switching to smoking as a way to quit vaping. Are even stories of parents giving their kids cigarettes to help them quit vaping. It should go without saying that none of the studies in our review would look at this because this would be highly unethical to do. We know that smoking is more harmful than vaping nicotine, and that it would be completely inappropriate to try and get someone to switch from vaping to smoking. But we are aware that's out there and we are trying to roll that into our communications here as well, so just to flag that as something troubling that we're seeing. I think that's. Anything else that you doubt about this review, Nicola.

NL

I wondered just to cover a little bit of our motivation behind doing this, because obviously we're doing this alongside our review of electronic cigarettes for smoking cessation and we have found evidence that E cigarettes help people to quit. So, there may be some people questioning, well, you know well if this is a good quitting tool why necessarily do we want to help people to quit vaping and I think there's a couple of key reasons one of them is just that we know that there are some people who want to quit vaping, whether they've just taken up vaping independently of smoking, or whether they've used it to quit. For example, you could imagine somebody who had quit smoking using the vape, who then became pregnant, might want to give up. Because regardless of whether vaping is safer than smoking, they may not want to do that when they're pregnant, and also people in general just don't like the idea of being addicted to a substance. There are lots of different reasons, but we know that there are some people who want to give up vaping, but the other reason that we've kind of been thinking around is that there is a lot of people who are maybe worried about taking up vaping to quit smoking. Certainly here we've been doing some interviews with people as part of projects where we've been hearing a lot about people not wanting to switch one addiction for another or yeah, one behaviour for another and what we are wondering and we we'd like to do some more work in this area is looking at whether if people know that there ways to quit vaping they might be more willing to switch to vaping in the 1st place, because then we'd be able to say to people, well, we know you might be a little bit worried about switching to vaping and that this might be something then that you do long term, but there are ways that we can support you then to quit vaping. So first step, let's get you off cigarettes. And then we can look at reducing your vaping and ultimately helping you to quit vaping. So I think those two points are kind of the things things that are driving us with this review.

JHB

That's a really good point, Nicola. The other thing that made me think of is one of the outcomes that we're interested in this review. Obviously we're interested in whether or not people quit vaping. We’re Interested in the side effects of whatever treatments are being used. We're also interested in looking at whether these interventions to help people quit vaping have any impact on smoking behaveiours whether positive or negative. There are certainly concerns that among people who vape to quit smoking, quitting vaping could lead to relapse. We obviously want to make sure that any interventions that are being recommended are avoiding that risk. We found very few studies reporting on smoking outcomes, so a call out if you're a researcher who's thinking about doing an intervention and testing it for quitting vaping. Please do collect and report smoking related outcomes as well. Really curious to see those and we know that that's an important outcome for many people listening. Think that's it from us. So just to let you know there'll be probably even more chat about ongoing studies and new studies in our episodes to come as we continue to cover interventions where people are given e-cigarettes to help them quit smoking. And now moving forward, also interventions that are testing ways to help people quit vaping. Thanks so much for listening. Happy 2025 once again and we will talk to you next month.

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.

JHB

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.