Letter

For Smoking Cessation, E-Cigarette Flavors Aren't Required**Melissa Ward-Peterson PhD, MPH[®], Wasim Maziak MD, PhD**

Department of Epidemiology, Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, Florida International University, Miami, FL

Corresponding Author: Melissa Ward-Peterson, PhD, MPH, Robert Stempel College of Public Health and Social Work, Florida International University, 11200 SW 8th Street, AHC5-483, Miami, FL 33199, USA. Telephone: 305-348-2075;

E-mail: mward@fiu.edu

In their simulation study comparing the possible risks of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) in increasing smoking initiation rates with their potential benefit of increasing smoking cessation rates, Warner and Mendez find that e-cigarettes' benefits outweigh their risks. They state that "public communications and policy must be developed to address both obligations" to prevent the development of new adolescent smokers and aid current smokers in their cessation efforts.¹ They conclude by stating that caution must be exercised where the goals of preventing initiation are at odds with the goals of promoting cessation, and that favor should be given to the goals of cessation.¹ They cite in support of this notion the Henningfield and Slade model, which was likely influenced by pharmaceutical industry interests.²

The authors emphasize the importance of communication and policy in encouraging e-cigarettes as a cessation tool for adults, while discouraging their use among youth through educational campaigns and age restrictions.¹ This surgical targeting of two societal groups that live together and influence each other with conflicting messages and restrictions is easier said than done, to say the least.³ Early in the cigarette epidemic, the tobacco industry made similar claims of targeted marketing of only adult customers, but in fact, they were aiming at expanding their consumer base among youth.⁴ It should also be noted that age restrictions for purchasing alternative nicotine delivery systems (ANDS) are already in place, yet we are witnessing an epidemic of ANDS use among youth in the United States.⁵

Most importantly, the authors fail to mention a vital area for policy intervention in which the goals of prevention and cessation do not conflict: banning flavored e-liquid products that are known to be appealing to youth. Studies have shown that the wide availability of these electronic liquid flavors plays a key role in adolescents' curiosity in and initiation of ANDS.⁶ Moreover, recent evidence indicates that sweet fruity or dessert-flavored products are favored by youth, whereas adults prefer unsweetened and unflavored products.⁶

The precipitous rise of the JUUL device's popularity among adolescents over the last year offers serious cause for caution in relation to ANDS-based cessation solutions.⁷ JUUL devices, which have come to dominate the youth ANDS market in a record time, are made by

a company with a mission to "improve the lives of the world's one billion adult smokers" and which claims to be working with government and state advocacy organizations on youth prevention efforts.^{8,9} Surely, JUUL should be able to carry out its stated mission without the variety of flavors that make these products appealing to youth.

The US Food and Drug Administration's recent statement on the epidemic of e-cigarette use among US youth highlights the alarming nature of current trends: "The disturbing and accelerating trajectory of use we're seeing in youth, and the resulting path to addiction, must end."⁵ In the face of such an epidemic and with a lack of clear evidence about the benefits of e-cigarettes as a cessation tool,¹⁰ their effects on youth initiation should take center stage. At the very least, we may agree that although flavors are not essential for adult smokers' quitting efforts, they are critical in attracting youth to e-cigarettes and need to be prioritized for regulation.

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Declaration of Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

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