Letter to the Editor

Tackling E-cigarette use in children: A proactive approach

Amy Haeffner

University of Exeter Medical School, Exeter, Devon, UK

Correspondence: Amy Haeffner, University of Exeter Medical School, College of Medicine and Health, St Luke's Campus, Heavitree Road, Exeter, Devon EX1 2LU, UK. E-mail: alh228@exeter.ac.uk

Dear Editor,

As in Canada, the UK is similarly facing endemic 'vaping' among children and young people; in fact, 15.4% of 11- to 18-year-olds in the UK had tried an electronic (e) cigarette in 2019 (1). As highlighted in the recent article 'E-cigarettes: A new hazard for children and adolescents' by Richmond et al. (2020), this poses an exceptionally high risk for children and young people surrounding the development of both acute and potentially chronic conditions (2).

An important aspect of management of this concerning trend highlighted in the aforementioned article is the appeal to national governing bodies to enforce legislation 'around the use, access and control of sale and purchase of e-cigarettes'. While this is vital in providing the backbone of governmental support surrounding risk reduction, I believe that it would be pertinent as medical professionals to extend further risk reduction strategies involving engaging children and adolescents in public health campaigns surrounding the hazards of e-cigarettes. Categorically, there needs to be a shift in the public youth's perception of e-cigarettes and 'vaping' to facilitate healthful choices in young people (3). It is important to note that many current health messages surrounding e-cigarettes actually present these devices as 'healthier' than smoking 'normal' cigarettes, a rhetoric that has been perpetuated by the UK government reviews (4). While comparably these devices may pose fewer risks in current smokers, these messages may be misconstrued by children and young people who have never smoked, causing them to try the habit. Hence, this is a notion that must be carefully constructed before exhibition to the public. A change in the messages young people are exposed to surrounding taking up 'vaping' is crucial, something this article did not mention as an action point for clinicians or government alike.

In the UK, public health campaigns have been primarily successful; a National Institute for Health Research large systematic review in January of 2019 showed that there was a positive change in sexual health behaviour—especially in young people—after public health campaigns (5). It is, however, integral that public health campaigns are targeted at an appropriate

audience, in an appropriate way (5). Therefore, healthcare professionals internationally should increase the public awareness of the findings of this paper—along with others exposing the danger of e-cigarettes—through actively recommending and participating in the production of public health messages suited for children and adolescents. By targeting the media outlets most frequented by this demographic, health beliefs and behaviours held can be appropriately informed and changed. Social media is an underused tool in public health and medico-politics and could be harnessed by many medical professionals to produce reliable and engaging resources for children and young people (6).

In conclusion, Richmond et al.'s (2) article touches on an undoubtedly imperative and pressing public health issue. However, it is no longer the time to rely solely on governmental legislation to improve health outcomes for individuals. As medical professionals, we have a responsibility to raise our voices in public health campaigning and networking, and this should be reflected in the recommendations offered in research.

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