



WHAT'S WRONG WITH E-CIGARETTES?

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Imagine if there were an alternative to smoking cigarettes. Imagine this alternative could help millions of people quit smoking and came with only a fraction of the harmful chemicals that cigarettes do. Well, you don't have to imagine it. It exists.

E-cigarettes are the most innovative and promising smoking-cessation product yet invented. So, public health officials and anti-tobacco activists are all in favor of this life-saving innovation, right? Actually, they're almost all totally against it.

Why? Because, incredibly, they make no substantial distinction between e-cigarettes and real cigarettes – even though they are completely different products.

To begin with, e-cigarettes aren't cigarettes. They contain no tobacco. Instead, a liquid containing nicotine derived from tobacco leaves is vaporized, and users of e-cigarettes inhale that vapor. Vapor, mind-you – not smoke.

This is significant because the real harm from tobacco comes from the combustion process, which releases hundreds of toxic compounds known as tar. Since e-cigarettes have no tobacco and no combustion, they release no tar. This makes them, according to Britain's Department of Health, at least 95% less harmful than tobacco cigarettes.

E-cigarettes do contain nicotine, an addictive drug. However, there is little evidence that nicotine alone is bad for you, making it similar to, say, caffeine – a drug used every day by millions of people.

Brad Rodu, an oral cancer specialist at the University of Louisville, put it this way: "I love coffee, and I'm sure I could get caffeine if I smoked my coffee beans...but I would be paying a much different price in overall health [if I did]."

In other words, when it comes to addictive substances like caffeine or nicotine, it isn't the addictive substance that's harmful; it's how it's delivered. As South African psychiatrist Mike Russell said about cigarettes: "[People] smoke for [the] nicotine, but they die from the tar." And again, there's no tar in e-cigarettes.

Does this all mean e-cigarettes are completely safe? Of course not. Nothing is completely safe. E-cigarettes are a relatively new innovation so more research is needed, especially on long-term effects. There's also a place for sensible regulation to ensure consumer safety.

But unlike normal everyday products, any potential risk posed by e-cigarettes is far outweighed

by a real – not potential – good: saving lives by providing the nicotine that smokers enjoy without delivering the deadly toxins that can kill them.

Many former smokers have successfully used e-cigarettes to help them kick their nicotine addiction altogether. A recent study in an Oxford Journal peer-reviewed publication, *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, said that e-cigarettes could reduce smoking-related deaths by 21 percent. That's thousands of lives every year.

John Britton, an epidemiologist and director of the University of Nottingham's Center for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies, is even more optimistic: "[E-cigarettes are] the first genuinely new way of helping people stop smoking that has come along in decades...[They] have the potential to help half or more of all smokers get off cigarettes."

So, again, you'd think public health officials and anti-tobacco groups would be doing everything they could to encourage smokers to switch to e-cigarettes. Instead, they push for laws and rules that equate the two products: cigarettes are bad, so e-cigarettes must also be bad. As of August 2016, the US Food and Drug Administration has ruled that all e-cigarettes must go through a long and expensive application process. This process could end up costing as much as \$1 million per new product.

While some of the biggest manufacturers will be able to shoulder the costs and navigate the regulatory mess, most small e-cigarette companies will be forced out of business. With less competition, e-cigarettes will become more expensive, and many people will go right back to smoking.

E-cigarette prohibitionists may think they're using a "better-safe-than-sorry" approach to save consumers from some yet-to-be-discovered danger, but they're not. They're actually endangering millions of smokers who would make the switch if the e-cigarette market were allowed to flourish.

As Joe Nocera, a New York Times columnist, wrote: "Equating smoking cigarettes with inhaling e-cigarettes...is a huge disservice to public health. On the scale of potential harms, e-cigarettes aren't even in the same ballpark as combustible cigarettes. They have the potential to save millions of lives."

The government needs to develop a new paradigm for dealing with e-cigarettes – one that ensures basic standards but recognizes their relative safety and immense benefit to public health.

If they don't, more people will die.

Imagine that.

I'm Caroline Kitchens of the R Street Institute for Prager University.