

Discussions between health professionals and smokers about nicotine vaping products: Results from the 2016 ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey

Gravelly, S., Thrasher, J.F., Cummings, K.M., Ouimet, J., McNeill, A., Meng, G., Lindblom, E., Loewen, R., O'Connor, R.J., Thompson, M.E., Hitchman, S.C., Hammond, D., Heckman, B., Borland, R., Yong, H.H., Elton-Marshall, T., Bansal-Travers, M., Gartner, C., & Fong, G.T.

Abstract

BACKGROUND AND AIMS: Debate exists about whether health professionals (HPs) should advise smokers to use nicotine vaping products (NVPs) to quit smoking. The objectives were to examine in four countries: (1) prevalence of HP discussions and recommendation to use an NVP; (2) who initiated NVP discussions; (3) the type of HP advice received about NVPs; and (4) smoker's characteristics related to receiving advice about NVPs.

DESIGN: Cross-sectional study using multivariable logistic regression analyses on weighted data from the 2016 ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey (ITC 4CV1).

SETTING: Four countries with varying regulations governing the sale and marketing of NVPs: "most restrictive" (Australia), "restrictive" (Canada) or "less restrictive" (England and US).

PARTICIPANTS: 6,615 adult smokers who reported having visited an HP in the last year (drawn from the total sample of 12,294 4CV1 respondents, of whom 9,398 reported smoking cigarettes daily or weekly). Respondents were from the United States (US, n=1,518), England (n=2,116), Australia (n=1,046), and Canada (n=1,935).

MEASUREMENTS: Participants' survey responses indicated if they were current daily or weekly smokers and had visited an HP in the past year. Among those participants, further questions asked participants to report 1) whether e-cigarettes were discussed, 2) who raised the topic, 3) advice received on use of e-cigarettes, and 4) advice received on quitting smoking.

METHODS: Data were from the 2016 ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Survey (ITC 4CV1), consisting of 6,615 adult smokers who reported having visited an HP in the last year (drawn from the total sample of 12,294 4CV1 respondents, of whom 9,398 reported smoking cigarettes daily or weekly). Respondents were from the United States (US, n=1,518), England (n=2,116), Australia (n=1,046), and Canada (n=1,935), Multivariable logistic regression analyses were conducted on weighted data.

FINDINGS: Among the 6,615 smokers who visited an HP in the last year, 6.8% reported discussing NVPs with an HP, and 2.1% of smokers were encouraged to use an NVP (36.1% of those who had a discussion). Compared with Australia (4.3%), discussing NVPs with an HP was more likely in the US (8.8%, OR=2.15, 95% CI=1.41-3.29) and Canada (7.8%, OR=1.87, 95% CI=1.26-2.78). Smokers in Australia were less likely to discuss NVPs than smokers in England (6.2%), although this was not statistically significant (OR=1.47, 95% CI=0.98-2.20). Overall, the prevalence of HPs recommending NVPs was three-times more likely in the US than in Australia (OR=3.07, 95% CI= 1.45-6.47), and twice as likely in Canada (OR=2.28, CI=1.06-4.87) than in Australia. Australia and England did not differ (OR=1.76, 95% CI=0.83-3.74). Just over half (54%) of respondents brought up NVPs themselves; there were no significant differences among countries.

CONCLUSIONS: Discussions in Australia, Canada, England, and the US between smokers and health professionals about nicotine vaping products appear to be infrequent, regardless of the regulatory environment. A low percentage of health professionals recommended vaping products. This is particularly evident in Australia, which has the most restrictive regulatory environment of the four countries studied.

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