

AFA CYMRU MEDICAL GROUP

POSITION STATEMENT REGARDING THE USE OF E-CIGARETTES BY SUBSTITUTE CARERS

Introduction

Tobacco smoke is a major contributor to the global burden of disease and the health risks associated are well known, including for those who inhale tobacco smoke passively (second-hand smoke inhalation). These risks are reflected in guidance previously issued by CoramBAAF in relation to the approach to decision making around substitute carers who smoke tobacco (1).

The use of e-cigarettes, offering a tobacco free form of nicotine consumption and behavioural substitution, have been promoted as tools to reduce health risk, assisting those who wish to stop smoking tobacco. A recent report published by Public Health England (2) concluded that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful than tobacco, whilst acknowledging that they are not completely risk free products. However, the level of harm reduction reported has been questioned (3). There have been concerns around the lack of evidence regarding the longer term health effects of e-cigarettes, given not only their nicotine content but also other agents such as solvents and metal

residues which may pose risk to health, including for those who passively inhale the vapour generated. There is no evidence to our knowledge showing that e-cigarette emissions (second-hand aerosol) are safe for non-users to inhale. The British Medical Association has previously called for stronger controls on where e-cigarettes can be used, with their use prohibited in public places where tobacco smoking is already prohibited (4) which in Wales includes the work place. Nicotine, which e-cigarettes are primarily designed to deliver, is known to be harmful to the health of pregnant women and the foetus. There are reports indicating that nicotine contributes to cardiovascular disease as well as having some involvement in the biology of malignant disease and neuro-degenerative conditions. Concerns have also been raised in relation to nicotine having potential adverse effects on brain development in children and adolescents (5). Cases of poisoning in young children associated with e-cigarettes have increased according to a recent American study, which is a concern given the potential toxicity of nicotine, with a death

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reported in association with a nicotine liquid exposure (6). As a result of this background, the Medical Group of AFA Cymru has concerns about the welfare of children and young people in Wales who might be placed with substitute carers who use e-cigarettes.

Concerns have been raised that the availability of e-cigarettes, which are marketed in various flavours that could be attractive to children and young people, might increase the use of these products by these groups, potentially resulting in adverse consequences for health and encouraging nicotine dependency. A recent report by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicated a threefold increase in e-cigarette use amongst American High School students between 2013 and 2014.

The Medical Group of AFA Cymru are concerned that children and young people in Wales might be influenced by a role modelling effect should their carers be seen using e-cigarettes, and that the use of these products might normalise 'smoking' behaviour at a time when legislation has been introduced in Wales to discourage this, for example the ban on smoking tobacco in public places and in cars in which children are being transported.

Many of the children and young people who require substitute care in Wales face disadvantage in areas of their life, including health. The welfare of this vulnerable group is the primary concern of the professionals and Agencies charged

with their care. Whilst acknowledging that e-cigarette use as a substitute for tobacco smoking is likely to pose a much lower level of risk to the health of the individual who switches, the Medical Group of AFA Cymru do not feel that the evidence that is currently available supports the view that they are safe and pose no risk to the current and future health of children and young people who might be placed with an e-cigarette user.

Recommendation by AFA Cymru Medical Group

For this reason, and until evidence becomes available to indicate that they are risk free products, the Medical Group of AFA Cymru hold the view that e-cigarette use by substitute carers should be considered in the same way as tobacco use, with guidance issued by CoramBAAF in practice note 51 followed from an approval / matching perspective.

Regular review of this position statement will occur in the future in light of research evidence, with formal review scheduled in August 2017.

References

(1) Practice note 51, Reducing the risks of environmental tobacco smoke for looked after children and their carers. CoramBAAF publication, 2007.

(2) E-cigarettes: an evidence update. A report commissioned by Public Health England. McNeill et al. PHE publications gateway number: 2015260. Published August 2015.

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(3) E-cigarettes: Public Health England's evidence-based confusion. Lancet editorial, 386, 9996, p829, August 2015.

(4) BMA calls for stronger regulation of e-cigarettes. March 2012 (updated November 2014).

A briefing from the BMA's Board of Science and Occupational Medicine Committee. https://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/e-cigarettesbriefing_-03-12-2014 - accessed 1st August 2016

(5) Electronic nicotine delivery systems. Report by WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, July 2014. www.who.int/fctc/publications.

Document FCTC/COP/5/13.

(6) Pediatric exposure to e-cigarettes, nicotine and tobacco products in the United States. Kamboi et al, Pediatrics, 2016 Jun; 137(6). pii: e20160041

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