LETTER

“Enjoy the future of smoking”
Brian R McAvoy

The development and promotion of electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) has polarised medical opinion over policy, with advocates for tougher legislation pitched against those promoting harm minimisation.1

Currently there is no robust evidence on the long-term effects, efficacy in harm reduction or smoking cessation, or safety of e-cigarettes. In the UK, marketing of e-cigarettes is extensive, and growing rapidly. They are promoted as lifestyle products and are available in a wide range of flavours and packaging that is likely to appeal to children and young people.2 They are available in an extensive range of venues, including some pharmacies, shopping malls, supermarkets and petrol stations. Spending on e-cigarette promotion in the UK increased from £1.7 million in 2010 to £13.1 million in 2012.3

The tobacco industry is taking an increasingly dominant role in this market.3 Although the e-cigarette industry claims that it is promoting its products to encourage tobacco smoking cessation, its marketing techniques, embracing aesthetic appeal, internet and social media tools, celebrity endorsement and sports sponsorship, suggest otherwise.

On a recent visit to Scotland I noticed this prominent advertisement on top of a petrol station bowser (Figure 1). The tagline “Enjoy the future of smoking” reveals the true motivation of the manufacturers. Such advertising directly challenges the unambiguous “say no to smoking” message, and undermines hard-won tobacco control policies such as smokefree public places, age restricted sales and point of sale restrictions.

While awaiting clear evidence to emerge on the role, if any, of e-cigarettes in smoking cessation, it is vital that governments and public health authorities act rapidly to counter unfettered commercial exploitation of vulnerable populations, especially young non-smokers, pregnant women and adults with heart disease.

The New Zealand Ministry of Health should continue to support the World Health Organization advice on electronic nicotine delivery systems,4 and should be vigorous in monitoring and enforcing the restriction of their sales to pharmacies.

The New Zealand Government needs to resist undermining of its tobacco control laws and endeavour to limit marketing of e-cigarettes until the research evidence is available to establish their place (if any) as a safe and effective component of tobacco control at the individual and population levels.5
Figure 1. Advertisement at a petrol station in Scotland

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References


