

# E-cigarettes compared with nicotine replacement therapy within the UK Stop Smoking Services: the TEC RCT

Peter Hajek,<sup>1</sup> Anna Phillips-Waller,<sup>1\*</sup> Dunja Przulj,<sup>1</sup> Francesca Pesola,<sup>2</sup> Katie Myers Smith,<sup>1</sup> Natalie Bisal,<sup>1</sup> Jinshuo Li,<sup>3</sup> Steve Parrott,<sup>3</sup> Peter Sasieni,<sup>2</sup> Lynne Dawkins,<sup>4</sup> Louise Ross,<sup>5</sup> Maciej Goniewicz,<sup>6</sup> Qi Wu<sup>3</sup> and Hayden J McRobbie<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Health and Lifestyle Research Unit, Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine, Queen Mary University of London, London, UK

<sup>2</sup>King's Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, London, UK

<sup>3</sup>Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, UK

<sup>4</sup>Centre for Addictive Behaviours Research, School of Applied Sciences, London South Bank University, London, UK

<sup>5</sup>Leicester City Council, Leicester, UK

<sup>6</sup>Department of Health Behavior, Division of Cancer Prevention and Population Sciences, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Buffalo, NY, USA

\*Corresponding author [a.phillips-waller@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:a.phillips-waller@qmul.ac.uk)

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## Plain English summary

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## Plain English summary

A large number of smokers in the UK have stopped smoking with the help of e-cigarettes, but it is not known if e-cigarettes are as helpful as stop smoking medications that are provided by the UK Stop Smoking Services (SSSs). This information is needed to decide whether or not SSSs should include e-cigarettes among their treatment options.

A total of 886 smokers who were seeking help with quitting and did not mind whether they would use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), such as nicotine patches, or e-cigarettes were recruited at three SSSs. The smokers were randomly allocated (by chance) to receive weekly behavioural support and either a NRT of their choice (a single NRT product or product combinations) ( $n = 447$ ) or a starter pack of e-cigarettes ( $n = 439$ ). The trial ran from May 2015 to February 2018.

The participants were followed up for 1 year to see how many stopped smoking in each group.

Smokers using e-cigarettes suffered less cigarette withdrawal discomfort early on and had higher quit rates at all time points. At 1 year, 10% of participants in the NRT trial arm had been abstinent for the whole year, compared with 18% in the e-cigarette arm; regarding abstinence for at least 6 months, the figures were 12% in the NRT arm and 21% in the e-cigarette arm. Of interest, coughs and phlegm production also reduced more in people quitting with e-cigarettes than those quitting with NRT. This supports previous reports suggesting that an ingredient in e-cigarettes (i.e. propylene glycol) may protect vapers from airborne infections.

E-cigarette starter packs cost much less than NRT and so, if SSSs provide them, their use is likely to boost the success rates and reduce the costs of SSSs.



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