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Using e-cigarettes to quit smoking makes veterans less likely to quit smoking

SAN ANTONIO – E-cigarette manufacturers entice smokers with claims of assistance in quitting smoking, and many smokers use this product in an attempt to break free from tobacco. However, a study by clinicians at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System shows using e-cigarettes to quit smoking leads to poorer quit outcomes.

The effectiveness of e-cigarettes as a tool to quit tobacco has been unclear. Clinicians who assist veterans in quitting tobacco at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System wanted to explore the relationship between use of e-cigarettes and abstinence from tobacco in a group of veterans referred for treatment.

Michele Clements-Thompson and Luis Richter surveyed 120 veterans referred for tobacco dependence treatment about their use of treatment options, including behavioral counseling and use of e-cigarettes. For those who had used e-cigarettes, their opinion of whether they felt e-cigarettes helped with reducing or quitting smoking was elicited. Attendance at behavioral counseling visits and quit status as well as weeks abstinent from smoking were also gathered.

Results indicate that use of e-cigarettes led to poorer outcomes. Veterans who use e-cigarettes are over five times less likely to have quit smoking than those who do not use e-cigarettes. Although a significant proportion of veterans who use e-cigarettes (40 percent) believe that e-cigarettes are helping them to quit or at least helping them reduce their tobacco intake, this perception does not match reality. Counter to current popular belief or suggestions by recent advertisements, e-cigarettes may actually interfere with smokers' quit efforts. Additionally, veterans who did report quitting regular cigarettes while using e-cigarettes were much less likely to have quit for extended periods of time compared with veterans who did not use e-cigarettes (2.5 weeks versus 10.4 weeks).

The authors conclude that veterans' beliefs about the benefits of e-cigarettes differ from actual outcomes, and that the use of e-cigarettes as a tobacco cessation aid should be discouraged until further research is conducted.

Study results will be presented by Clements-Thompson, Richter, and fellow research author Shuko Lee at a poster session scheduled for 6 p.m. CT on April 23 during the Society of Behavioral Medicine's 2015 Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions in San Antonio. The poster is titled: "E-cigarettes and Tobacco Cessation: Perception versus Reality." The authors report no financial or other conflicts of interests.

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) is a 2,200-member organization of scientific researchers, clinicians and educators. They study interactions among behavior, biology and the environment, and translate findings into interventions that improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities (www.sbm.org).

South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS) is comprised of two inpatient campuses: the Audie L. Murphy Memorial Veterans Hospital in San Antonio and the Kerrville VA Hospital in Kerrville, Texas. STVHCS serves one of the largest primary service areas in the nation and is part of the VA Heart of Texas Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN 17), with offices located in Arlington, Texas. South Texas provides health care services for 80,000 unique veterans (www.southtexas.va.gov).

This study will be presented during the SBM 2015 Annual Meeting & Scientific Sessions, held April 22-25 in San Antonio. However, it does not reflect the policies or the opinion of SBM. This poster presentation will be held on April 23. Given that this study was presented at a scientific meeting, the data and conclusions reached should be regarded as preliminary, until they are published in a peer-reviewed journal. Funding agencies played no role in this study. There are no conflicts of interest for the investigators.

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