

Can e-cigarettes assist opiate agonist treatment clients to quit smoking? Methods and recruitment data.

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Introduction and Aims: Up to 94% of people receiving opiate agonist treatment (OAT) smoke tobacco cigarettes and most will relapse to smoking after a supported quit attempt. Innovative ways to reduce smoking in this group are urgently needed.

Nicotine containing e-cigarettes may help promote tobacco reduction/abstinence and reduce tobacco-related harm in highly nicotine-dependent populations. A pilot study of 50 NSW OAT clients found e-cigarettes acceptable and effective for smoking cessation and a 2020 Cochrane review suggested that they may work better than nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or behavioural support alone, without clear evidence of harm. This study will assess the potential for e-cigarettes to promote tobacco reduction and cessation in clients from six NSW Health-based opiate agonist treatment services.

Design and Methods: This multi-site randomised, single-blinded study will compare 12-weeks treatment with nicotine containing e-cigarettes to treatment with combination NRT in adult OAT clients who wish to reduce or quit smoking (N=572).

Results: Outcome data will be collected by computer assisted telephone interviewers blinded to treatment allocation at end-of-treatment and 12-week follow-up timepoints. The primary outcome will compare groups in self-reported 7-day point prevalence abstinence from cigarettes at end-of-treatment. Secondary outcomes include biochemically verified 7-day point prevalence abstinence, 30-day continuous abstinence, reduction in cigarettes smoked/day, nicotine withdrawal, relapse episodes, safety, treatment adherence, substance use, study retention and cost-consequence comparisons.

Discussions and Conclusions: The NSW Health Translational Research Grant funded study commenced recruitment in April 2021. E-cigarettes may provide a safe and effective approach for smoking cessation in people with co-occurring nicotine and opiate dependence.

Implications for Translational Research: New evidence will be generated regarding effective and translatable interventions for decreasing tobacco smoking in opiate treatment populations. This information will assist the development of strategies that may be implemented across the broader substance use treatment sector.

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