

General practitioner perceptions of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation: a systematic review

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Introduction and Issues: General Practitioners (GPs) play an important role in providing patients who smoke with support and treatment to encourage them to quit smoking. Despite conflicting evidence on the effectiveness of e-cigarettes for smoking cessation, many smokers and GPs are exploring e-cigarettes as an alternative to smoking tobacco. This systematic review aims to synthesise evidence from qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods studies of the perceptions and prescribing intentions of GPs towards e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid.

Method and Approach: Studies from MEDLINE, CINAHL, SCOPUS, PsycINFO, EMBASE and grey literature were searched. Two independent reviewers screened abstracts and full-text articles. A data extraction form was used to extract relevant data. Papers were appraised for quality using the MMAT checklist and a PRISMA flow diagram was used to record the flow of papers through the review.

Key Findings: A total of 4046 abstracts were screened and 29 articles were included. Our findings showed that GPs had mixed views on recommending e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid. Some GPs were optimistic and had recommended e-cigarettes to their patients. Others were reluctant and disagreed that e-cigarettes are an effective method to quit smoking. Most GPs lacked knowledge and confidence in having discussions with patients around e-cigarette safety and efficacy as a smoking cessation aid.

Discussions and Conclusions: Availability and popularity of e-cigarettes has presented challenges to GPs in supporting patients to quit smoking. This systematic review shows there are mixed views on recommending e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation alternative.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Clear guidance on the role of e-cigarettes is needed to inform and educate GPs about e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid. This review will be useful to guide policy on e-cigarettes and contribute to guideline development that informs the potential role and place of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation alternative.

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