

Perceptions of Australian general practitioner's on e-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids: a qualitative study

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Introduction: A significant policy change in Australia impacting the availability of nicotine for use in e-cigarettes took effect in October, 2021. Australian GP's are given the authority to prescribe nicotine e-liquids to patients who are intending to use e-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids. We aimed to explore GP's perceptions about the role of e-cigarettes and understand their intentions to prescribe e-cigarettes as smoking cessation treatments.

Methods: A qualitative study design was employed. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants from a larger survey study of e-cigarette knowledge, attitudes and prescribing intentions.

Results: Thirteen GP's (M:6, F:7) across Australia were interviewed. GP's held mixed views about using e-cigarettes to quit smoking. Some recommended e-cigarettes to older smokers and to smokers unable to quit using evidence-based cessation methods, whilst others didn't believe there was sufficient evidence and raised concerns about their safety and efficacy. GP's felt the prescribing policy in Australia around e-cigarettes was not sufficiently established which impacted their intentions to prescribe. Most didn't feel confident to prescribe, or have discussions about e-cigarettes with patients. More information and training were desired amongst GP's to help them confidently prescribe e-cigarettes to patients.

Conclusion: The findings from this study indicate that Australian GP's have diverse attitudes about e-cigarettes in the context of smoking cessation and their role prescribing nicotine e-liquids.

Implications: Clarity in guidelines and consumer product information are required to enable GP's to provide consistent and accurate advice to patients that wish to use e-cigarettes as smoking cessation aids.