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LETTERS



ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES

E-cigarettes—beware of the rocket in your pocket

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The recent Royal College of Physicians report on e-cigarettes and tobacco harm reduction missed an important point.^{1 2} We recently published the first case series of burn injuries from exploding rechargeable lithium ion batteries in e-cigarettes—thigh burns that required hospital admission and surgical debridement.³ Both patients described their e-cigarettes as bursting into flames like a “rocket in my pocket.” The devices were not second hand, counterfeit, or damaged and were purchased from UK high street stores. A Google search identified an alarming epidemic of e-cigarette related fires and explosions, with at least eight serious burn injuries during 2016 in the UK alone.

These rechargeable lithium ion batteries currently pose a real risk of explosion, fire, and serious injury.^{3 4} Consumer guidance is urgently needed on the safe storage and charging of these devices. We welcome any device regulation that would come with Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency licensing, because this should drive improvements in product safety and quality. It is completely unconscionable that public users are currently being sold devices that have the potential to explode spontaneously and cause serious injury. It would also be inexcusable to prescribe such a device to a patient without guarantee of safety. Given e-cigarettes are being proposed for

use by some of our young and potentially most vulnerable patients,^{5 6} these concerns need to be highlighted and considered as a matter of urgency.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: <http://www.bmj.com/content/353/bmj.i1745/rr-2>.

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- 2 Royal College of Physicians. Nicotine without smoke: tobacco harm reduction. 2016. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/nicotine-without-smoke-tobacco-harm-reduction-0>.
- 3 Nicoll KJ, Rose AM, Khan MAA, Quaba O, Lowrie AG. Thigh burns from exploding e-cigarette lithium ion batteries: First case series. *Burns* 2016;S0305-4179(16)30052-3. doi:10.1016/j.burns.2016.03.027 pmid:27118069.
- 4 McNeill A, Brose LS, Calder R, Hitchman SC, Hajek P, McRobbie H. E-cigarettes: an evidence update. Public Health England, 2015. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/457102/E-cigarettes_an_evidence_update_A_report_commissioned_by_Public_Health_England_FINAL.pdf.
- 5 Sutfin EL, Reboussin BA, Debinski B, Wagoner KG, Spangler J, Wolfson M. The impact of trying electronic cigarettes on cigarette smoking by college students: a prospective analysis. *Am J Public Health* 2015;105:e83-9. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2015.302707 pmid:26066954.
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