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Electronic Cigarettes and their Effect on College Students: Have We Exchanged One Evil for Another?

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Staff Article

Since the mid-2000s, there has been a growing presence of electronic cigarette usage on college campuses. By the Fall of 2021, approximately 75.7% of college students in the United States have used electronic cigarettes or another electronic nicotine delivery system¹. With growing numbers of college students becoming dependent on electronic cigarettes, it is imperative as a nation to determine what makes electronic cigarettes desirable.

According to the National Institution of Drug Abuse, when nicotine is administered into the body, it causes an increased level of the neurotransmitter dopamine.² Dopamine is associated with feelings of euphoria, and once these feelings dissipate, it reinforces the need to consume more of the drug, ultimately leading to addiction.²

In a survey among college students, their knowledge of electronic cigarettes was evaluated.³ Men concluded electronic cigarettes were more harmful than normal cigarettes, whereas females concluded that both electronic cigarettes and normal cigarettes were equally as harmful.³ This shows that there is a gender bias in the responses between college students. Whether it be the difference between female versus male perspectives, one thing that can be said for certain is there is a clear discrepancy in how dangerous electronic cigarettes are. This is especially problematic if some college students view electronic cigarettes as a safer alternative to regular cigarettes.

So, how can we combat this rise in e-cigarette usage? Well, in a study about the initiatives that could be implemented to help smokers quit smoking and protect the health of second-hand smoke for non-smokers, knowledge and attitudes about smoking legislation and education needs were documented.⁴ Out of four possible initiatives, it was reported that in terms of greatest to least need,

control over compliance with bans, cessation aid, informative campaigns, and courses on smoking issues were musts.⁴ However, after a campus-wide policy change regarding student usage rates of tobacco use before and after the policy, in terms of electronic nicotine delivery systems, there was over a 10% increase in smoking after the post-policy change.⁵

This proves there is still a greater need to provide funding for smoking cessation of electronic nicotine delivery systems. Graduating college students are the future leaders of America, and it is important that we invest in our future so our future can repay us.

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