## Correspondence

## Electronic cigarettes: we need evidence, not opinions

We read with interest the recent *Lancet* Editorial on e-cigarettes (Aug 29, p 829)<sup>1</sup> and the accompanying Letter by Ann McNeill and colleagues.<sup>2</sup>

McNeill and colleagues<sup>2</sup> criticise the Editorial on their e-cigarettes report<sup>3</sup> for focusing on one<sup>4</sup> of its 185 references. However, that reference was the only substantive reference cited in their report to justify the message that e-cigarettes are 95% safer than conventional cigarettes reported so prominently in the media (the other was simply a fact sheet that cited the first reference). Although McNeill and colleagues did review other evidence that e-cigarettes are safer (a view not in dispute), there was no independent attempt to verify the figure.

Crucially, many of the studies they used were also included in a recent systematic review,<sup>5</sup> although they failed to cite it. It concluded that much research on the health effects of e-cigarettes was methodologically weak, 34% of papers they reviewed were subject to conflicts of interest, and the evidence was inadequate to conclude that they were harmless. No-one can know the long-term effects of inhaling many of the substances present in e-cigarettes, particularly flavourings, because these chemicals have never been tested in that context.

It is particularly unfortunate that McNeill and colleagues failed to address the conflict of interests in a paper which played such a prominent role in the headlines they generated, which now appear even greater than reported by *The Lancet*.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, McNeill and colleagues simplify the issue by only contrasting vaping and smoking. It is essential to consider long-term dual use, and initiation of vaping among children and adults who would not otherwise smoke.

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We declare no competing interests.