Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care)(Scotland) Bill

Geoffrey Vann

There is a growing trend globally to regard ecigs as a curse rather than a boon for public health. As regards Scotland, it may be more relevant to look at the target of 5% prevalence by 2034 - the subject of a recent ASH conference.

Currently, there are approx 950,000 smokers - hopefully, the 15,000 pa who currently start smoking each year can be reduced to less than 5,000 pa by 2034, giving 200,000 new smokers over 20 years.

If we assume 25% of annual deaths are smokers, this will reduce the total of smokers by 275,000 by 2034.

The endgame target is around 250,000 smokers - to achieve this we will need to persuade over 30,000 smokers to quit per annum.

The latest Cessation Services results showed nearly 80,000 attempts with a 1 year success rate of 5%, giving 4,000 – research shows that one third of these will eventually relapse so about 2,700 lifetime quits.

The ASH England survey showed 1.1m GB quitters - pro-rated this would be over 100,000 for Scotland. The vast majority of these quitters have occurred in the last 2 years as the technology has advanced quickly. Whilst there exists a high level of ignorance and fear about the disruptive impact of e-cigarettes, a realistic assessment is needed to achieve the endgame.

The official government endgame projections are here: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Services/Smoking/SmokingProjectionReport

I will highlight the “Percentage of smokers who stopped smoking between 1 to 2 years ago” of 4.6% of all smokers. If we assume that only 30-40% of smokers make a quit attempt in any given year and that the majority of these smokers try with no aid or something less effective than the ‘gold standard’ cessation service rate of 5%, it should be clear that the endgame will not be reached without a significant contribution from ecigs. Treating them as quasi-tobacco with the attendant desire to regulate them restrictively as tobacco will be a public health disaster.

Geoffrey Vann