Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

KARIN HELEN O’LEARY

MA (University of Victoria, 2011)
BA (Hons) (University of Victoria, 2007)

“Vapour Products/E-Cigarettes: Claims and Evidence”

Social Dimensions of Health

Tuesday, April 3rd, 2018
8:00 a.m.
Technology Enterprise Facility
Room 220

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Tim Stockwell, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Marjorie MacDonald, School of Nursing, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Linda Bauld, University of Stirling (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Martin Jarvis, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London

Chair of Oral Examination:
Prof. Maneesha Deckha, Faculty of Law, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Vapour products (e-cigarettes) have rapidly grown in sales. While competing claims about the effects of vaping are fiercely debated within the public health community, no studies have examined the claims accepted in the regulatory arena. In the first article of this manuscript-based dissertation, my co-authors and I utilized narrative policy framework to identify the claims about vapour devices in legislation recommendation reports from Queensland Australia, Canada, and the European Union, and the United States. The vast majority of claims represented vapour devices as a threat, while the potential benefits were very rarely presented, resulting in bans and strict regulations.

Evidence on two claims, youth vaping as a risk for nicotine dependence, and vapour products as a cessation aid, was evaluated with systematic reviews. For the youth claim, we retrieved population surveys on (1) the prevalence of infrequent users among past-30-day users, (2) non-nicotine vaping, (3) cannabis vaping, and (4) the first product used. Surveys indicated that a near majority of students who were past-30-day users vaped only once or twice a month, and an appreciable number, 25% and more, reported consuming non-nicotine liquids. Furthermore, 80% to 90% of ever-users tried cigarettes first. Far fewer youth are at a risk for nicotine addiction than indicated by any past-30-day use. On the other hand, vaping as a mode of administration of other drugs has received little attention, and presents an unknown risk to youth.

We evaluated the claims about cessation with a review of systematic reviews (umbrella review). Three reviews, Hartmann-Boyce et al. (2016), Malas et al. (2016) and El-Dib et al. (2017) received the better quality ratings. They were unable to reach a definitive conclusion due to the limited number of randomized controlled trials and the low quality of most of the studies. We considered the reviewers’ tentative statements on their findings, the findings of the quality cohort studies, the potential underestimation of effectiveness in the studies, and the improved nicotine delivery of newer models. The weight of the evidence allowed us to conclude that vapour products have demonstrated their potential as a cessation aid.

In the jurisdictions studied in this dissertation, vapour products have been claimed to be a threat by leading youth to smoking and impeding cessation. Does the evidence support the claims? The possible risk of youth becoming dependent on nicotine from vaping is substantially lower than indicated by the metric of any past-30-day use. There is reasonable evidence that vapour products may be an effective cessation aid. With a better understanding of these two claims, we in public health should revisit the regulations, policies, and interventions for vapour products so that they are in line with the evidence, not unsupported claims.