



# Global Forum on Nicotine

Warsaw 2016

*A report for the Tobacco Harm Reduction Association of Canada.*

**Part 3 / Day 1.**

**Asking the right questions about smoking and alternative nicotine delivery systems**

**Professor Linda Bauld (University of Stirling, UK)**

The Global Forum on Nicotine (GFN) was held at the Marriott Hotel, in Warsaw, on Friday 17th and Saturday 18th June 2016. The Tobacco Harm Reduction Association of Canada (THRA) was represented at this conference.

The theme of this year's conference was, 'Evidence, Accountability and Transparency.'

The message was delivered by an impressive line-up of international speakers.

## Asking the right questions about smoking and alternative nicotine delivery systems.

**Professor Linda Bauld (University of Stirling, UK)**

Professor Bauld got 'right down to it.'

"We could be doing better."

Better at what?

Better at: "measuring this new phenomenon; e-cigarette use."



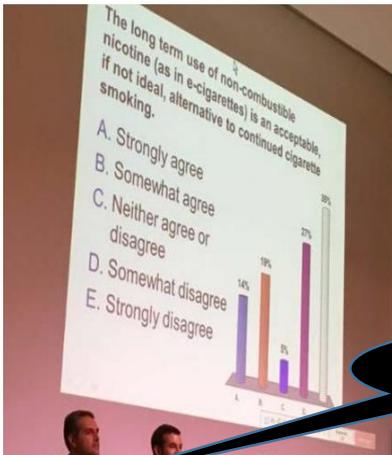
Although the topic was, 'asking the right questions,' right at the start of the presentation an example was given of a perfectly correct question, but one which received very different responses on the two sides of the Atlantic, and it was pointed out that It is not just the questions themselves which can affect the way people think – what is happening in the background also plays an important part: It is those 'other' questions: the questions that went before: the questions that inform policy which are so very, very important.

The example given was: "the long-term use of non-combustible nicotine (as in e-cigarettes) is an acceptable, if not ideal, alternative to continued cigarette smoking." (*Hayden McRobbie*)

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Somewhat agree
- C. Neither agree or disagree
- D. Somewhat disagree
- E. Strongly disagree

In the US, at the Global Tobacco Dependence Treatment Summit, only 33% of those present agreed, whereas, in the UK, in response to the same question, at the UK Nicotine and Smoking Cessation Conference, 90% agreed – what could possibly account for this massive difference in opinion? I will

## An American View



At the Global Tobacco Dependence Treatment Summit 2016...only 33% of attendees agreed

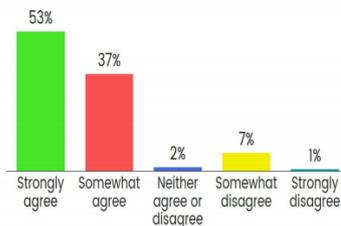
Are they nuts?

Clive Bates. Are they nuts? The dysfunction and decadence of tobacco control in one chart. 24 May 2016. [www.clivebates.com/?p=4124](http://www.clivebates.com/?p=4124)

## But in the UK...

The long-term use of non-combustible nicotine is an acceptable, if not ideal, alternative to smoking

Mentimeter



Votes: 129

At the UK Nicotine and Smoking Cessation Conference in June 2016...

90% agreed

reproduce the two slides here, because at the bottom of the first is a comment by Clive Bates which emphasises the importance of, "asking the right questions and knowing what is going on in the background."

Because attitudes to e-cigarettes are so varied across borders and because regulations differ widely research has a crucial role to play in achieving some sort of consensus as to what vaping is and what e-cigarettes can do.

Asking the right questions is central to having regulation fit for the purpose. To create: "consistent policy and not just spreading fear and alarm."

An area where we find wrong questions being asked is where prevalence and outcomes of e-cigarette use are being investigated.

All too often these studies, "ask the wrong questions, or, response categories were combined or important distinctions were not understood by the researchers."



Professor Bauld then pointed to a recent study published by researchers at the University of Stirling. This was the professor's own University, [and mine] but not her department, and the effect of this, I think, was all the more poignant for that. As she pointed out, the production of this study, due to its inherent faults, made her very angry,

Here was a study which generated a great deal of media attention.

The researchers claimed that, to put it in its simplest terms, children seeing e-cigarettes and advertising at point of sale encouraged them to take up use.

This was a cross-sectional study which aimed to investigate any possible link between displays of e-cigarettes and marketing materials at point of sale, and use of, and intention to use, e-cigarettes and hey presto, the rabbit was pulled from the hat. But how did they manage it?



3,808 secondary school pupils in Scotland were asked to completed one cross sectional survey. [A type of observational study that involves the analysis of data collected from a population, or a representative subset, at one specific point in time]. On the issue of use, they were asked if they had ever heard of them: had they 'used' them and a series of options designed to find out how often they 'used' them... **then they lumped everything together into two categories, ever tried and never tried.** This was then followed by questions asking if they had ever seen them for sale in shops in the previous thirty days– what kind of shops, and so forth.

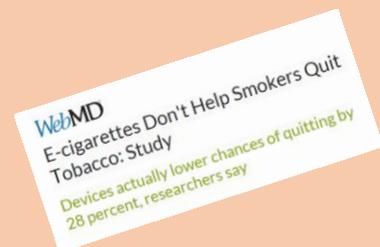


But what is really interesting is something which was not included in the research paper. Professor Bauld requested more information from the researchers, and this is what she said about what she found...

**“...so when they sent me a table which wasn't in the paper, there were only six... six children out of almost four thousand, who were never smokers who regularly used e-cigarettes, on the basis of a point of sale display, or something else, and this seems to me to be a fairly fatal omission given the press headlines that the study generated which were then used to argue locally for, that not only did we need to ban all forms of e-cigarette advertising that are included in our domestic legislation in Scotland, but actually, we needed to remove the point of sale marketing as well...”**



And it is a similar story with some studies which look at adult use. An appalling example of media generated frenzy from a flawed study was a systematic review and meta-analysis looking at e-cigarette use among adults -**it did not concern itself about reasons for vaping.**

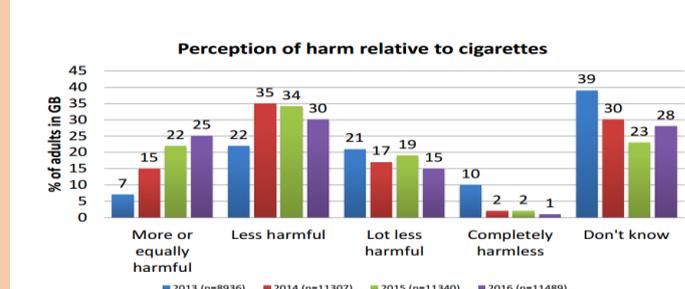


[The study was entitled 'E-cigarettes and smoking cessation in real-world and clinical settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis:' by Sara Kalkhoran, MD, Prof Stanton A. Glantz, PhD.]

In this study the questions are not consistent. In some of the studies, ever use (past 30 days) was the only category studied, this study has been commented critically on by Carl Phillips, [Sunday Science Lesson: What is “meta-analysis”? (and why was Glantz's inherently junk?)] Clive Bates [Who will be duped by error-strewn 'meta-analysis' of e-



### Poor research contributes to confusion



[cigarette studies?](#)] and more than just a few others.

Because the questions asked in these studies are not the same it is impossible to compare them. But the main problem with poor studies, as exemplified above, is that it affects people's perceptions about e-cigarette safety.

Professor Bauld pointed out that although, “we have pretty good questions,” with regard to cigarette smoking, the same does not hold true for e-cigarettes. Because the questions on e-cigarettes are so poorly constructed, you cannot draw reliable conclusions from them. But there is plenty we can do...

One remedy would be to have a set of recognised core questions. Getting the terminology clarified is important, and standardisation on questions dealing with frequency of use would avoid a great deal of confusion.

Research should also be clear on things like nicotine content and types of device used, and, in some cases, asking about reasons for use would be helpful.

Getting round the table, and discussing and deciding what can be done would see a start to an improvement in research – this is already happening in the UK.

Professor Bauld then summed up the key points of her presentation which I reproduce here...

- ✚ There’s a lot of poor research out there – and I’ve only talked about problems with assessing use
- ✚ Standard questions are helpful to allow comparison and also replicability
- ✚ The research community is making progress in agreeing some core questions
- ✚ We need to keep working with vapers and others, however, to make sure what we are asking makes sense.

All images: <https://gfn.net.co/downloads/2016/Linda%20Bauld.pdf>

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**With special thanks to the GFN for the immaculate organisation of the conference, and for supplying much of the information from which this summary is gleaned.**

Robert innes: Advisory Board Representative of the THRA at the GFN