

**Letter from 40 academics and experts in support of the complaint about the research letter published in the New England Journal of Medicine on *Hidden Formaldehyde in E-cigarette Aerosol***

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[By email: [editorial@nejm.org](mailto:editorial@nejm.org)]

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Dear Dr Drazen

In their letter published online on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2015 [1], *Jensen et al* reported measurements of 'hidden formaldehyde' in e-cigarette vapour and estimated a resulting cancer risk, which was then compared unfavourably to cigarette smoke. The letter created headlines worldwide.

However, it appears clear that the device used was operated in unrealistic laboratory conditions and that human subjects would never experience the exposures that were measured and used in the calculation of cancer risk. The letter is therefore based on a major methodological error, and the calculations of cancer risk and comparison with cigarette smoke are invalid and misleading. The findings are *unreliable* in the sense intended in the Retractions Guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics, of which the New England Journal is a member. The authors' reply to a critical letter did not provide a convincing defence of their research and conclusions [2].

Cigarette smokers face high risks of disease and premature death. It is essential that they are provided with valid, well-founded information about the options available to them to stop smoking or to cut down, including switching to e-cigarettes. Misleading information about risks of e-cigarettes may adversely influence choices made by smokers in a way that may harm their health. There is, therefore, an especially strong ethical imperative to measure and report risks associated with e-cigarettes with great care.

We urge you to examine in detail the case for retracting *Jensen et al* set out in full in the attached document prepared by Clive Bates and Konstantinos Farsalinos.

Section 15 of the COPE Code of Conduct obliges member journals to have a transparent process for handling complaints and dissatisfied complainants. We would be grateful if you could confirm receipt of this correspondence and set out the mechanism that the journal uses to handle a complaint of this nature.

Once the journal has examined this complaint and its implications, we would be grateful for your considered response and views on the appropriate course of action.

[1] Jensen RP, Luo W, Pankow JF, Strongin RM, Peyton DH. Hidden formaldehyde in e-cigarette aerosols. *N Engl J Med* 2015; **372**: 392–4.

[2] Jensen RP, Luo W, Pankow JF, et al. More on Hidden Formaldehyde in E-Cigarette Aerosols. *N Engl J Med* 2015;**372**:1575–7.

Yours sincerely

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