

Guest blog by Louise Ross: Whose health are we talking about?

Intro by Clive Bates. You may remember Louise Ross's brilliant first outing on this blog: [Let there be light!](#). Louise runs the NHS Stop Smoking Service in Leicester and she was full of optimism for the potential of vaping to help smokers quit smoking. She has carried on the mission and inspired and enthused many others.

But here, in a new guest blog, she explains her anger and 'speechless sadness' at the damage caused by WHO when it published its [report on 'Electronic Nicotine delivery Systems'](#) (e-cigarettes) in August - criticised in full in my [detailed report](#) and [letter to COP6 delegates](#).

The good thing is that Louise has renewed determination. She is an example to us all... *and the truth will eventually prevail*.

Louise Ross's guest blog starts here...



Determined...

Whose health are we talking about?

Only a few months ago, our [Stop Smoking service](#) was getting a huge amount of interest from people who wanted to know how they could use ecigs to switch from smoked tobacco. They told us how they had tried and failed with licensed products, or how they had managed for a few weeks or months, and then gone back to smoking again, after some bad news, or at a time of stress. We also talked

to people who had never even considered stopping smoking before, but had heard from friends that ecigs had done it for them, and wanted to know more.

Some signed up with us, and quit with their vaporisers, some tried it and found that it wasn't what they were looking for, and chose licensed products, to see if that worked for them any better. For some it did, and I'm pleased that we can support people to choose what works for them, rather than take a prescriptive line about what they must use.

And then it all seemed to change. Just around the time we had planned a lot of public-facing events for [Stoptober](#), the WHO report came out, followed by media headlines and scare-stories about how vaping 'might' cause numbers of smokers to increase, and that experts were 'concerned' that youth smoking may rise. In among all the headlines, extra urban myths had entered the public consciousness, it seemed. In late September, we stood at a market stall, giving out Stop information and telling people what we had to offer. 'No, I'm sticking to smoking' was what they told us, over and over. 'I've seen it on telly, it's safer to carry on smoking.' Illogical though this mind-set was, it seemed impossible to shift. My team reported the same thing at their workplace events: a general fear of quitting smoking combined with relief that carrying on smoking is actually endorsed! By experts!

Somewhere, something has gone terribly wrong, and the opportunities presented by alternative nicotine delivery devices, so promising earlier in the year, have been casually damaged by a risk-averse body of people whose responsibility it is to improve health, and by a section of the media industry that sells more papers by frightening people.

I'm waiting for a good news story from nationally respected bodies who I know are working on a reversal of this, but until then, all I can do is keep making sure local people know that Stop is there to support them to get smokefree, and work at repairing some of the damage done by people who would do well to listen to the [many positive stories told by vapers](#), who know that they will never go back to smoking.

At first I felt just impotent anger, then speechless sadness. Now I'm back on track, determined to add my voice to this unfathomable battle. I'm doing it because I want more people to see more birthdays.

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