



European Heart Network statement on tobacco use, harm reduction and product regulation

May 2007

Introduction

Every year over 1.9 million people die from cardiovascular diseases (CVD) in the European Union. Over 180 000 deaths from CVD are caused by smoking.¹

The European Heart Network (EHN) plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.

Background

In order to reduce effectively the risk of CVD from the use of tobacco and nicotine products, such use must be eliminated completely.

To eliminate the use of tobacco products, EHN believes that first and foremost the EU and all European countries need to establish comprehensive tobacco control strategies including high taxes, comprehensive bans on direct and indirect advertising of tobacco, smoking bans in public and workplaces (including restaurants and bars), strong warnings on labels (including pictorial warnings).

EHN considers that notwithstanding comprehensive tobacco control policies it is likely that a number of smokers will find it hard to give up smoking. This is especially true of socially disadvantaged people, who are more likely to be smokers and tend to be more heavily addicted.² Although smoking will become less common in the future due to better tobacco control policies, smoking will continue to cause large numbers of avoidable deaths and exacerbating social inequalities in health.

EHN recognises that reducing the harm that smoking will cause in people who continue to smoke is an extremely important issue.

¹ European cardiovascular disease statistics 2005; European Heart Network and British Heart Foundation; February 2005

² Jarvis MJ, Wardle J. Social Patterning of individual health behaviours: the case of cigarette smoking. In: Marmot M, Wilkinson R, editors. Social Determinants of Health. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1999.

EHN understands that nicotine replacement therapies (NRT) are effective as part of a strategy to promote smoking cessation³. EHN acknowledges that NRT are not without risk but situated at the lower end in the risk reduction continuum presenting an unequivocally lower risk than combustible tobacco products (cigarettes) for CVD

EHN is conscious that not all tobacco products carry the same risks. Level of risk relates to the nature of the tobacco product. The main distinction is between combustible and non-combustible tobacco products.⁴ Combustible forms of tobacco carry the highest level of risks because of the number of harmful constituents produced in the smoke. Non-combustible forms of tobacco, because they are not burned, generally carry a lower, or significantly lower, level of risk. Within each of these two categories, there can also be different degrees of risk associated with the product

Statement

EHN's long-term goal is to eliminate the use of tobacco and nicotine products so as to reduce to zero the risk of CVD from these products.

EHN deems that the implementation of a broad tobacco control strategy is the most important and most effective measure to increase smokers' readiness to stop.

EHN is concerned about how best to assist heavy smokers in their attempts to quit smoking and reduce harm and believes that smokers should have easy access to effective professional cessation support including pharmacological treatment when needed.

EHN is apprehensive about allowing tobacco products or nicotine delivery devices onto the market without the use of agreed upon rigorous testing and evaluation methods.

EHN supports the recommendation in the report '*Tobacco or Health in the European Union, Past, Present and Future*' (prepared by the ASPECT Consortium⁵ and published by the European Commission in October 2004) to establish a comprehensive regulatory framework for all tobacco and nicotine products at EU level. This would be the best way of achieving objective scientific information on the harmfulness or harm-reducing characteristics of the various products.

³ <http://www.euro.who.int/Document/E80056.pdf>

⁴ Tobacco or Health in the European Union, Past, Present and Future; European Commission; October 2004

⁵ Gopa-Cartermill, European Heart Network, European Network for Smoking Prevention and European Respiratory Society