

GUIDANCE STATEMENT

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and other novel nicotine containing products including the Voke Inhaler, for tobacco dependence

PAC recommendations

1. General practitioners should not prescribe e-cigarettes or other novel nicotine containing devices such as the Voke inhaler. If asked to prescribe them, they should either encourage self care or refer the patient to a locally commissioned smoking cessation service for treatment in line with current policy.
2. Local decisions should be made around future prescribing of e-cigarettes and other novel nicotine containing devices only after their place in therapy has been fully established and formulary processes have been followed.

Background

Over recent years, novel nicotine containing devices have been developed for use as medicines in the United Kingdom (UK). Electronic cigarettes (EC) are devices that deliver nicotine by heating and vaporising a solution that typically contains nicotine, propylene glycol and/or glycerol and flavourings.¹

Licensed versions of e-cigarettes that could be prescribed as medicines are currently in development. The e-Voke device has been granted a license by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) but has not yet been launched in the UK.²

The Voke device, a 'nicotine inhaler', is a breath-operated device which delivers pharmaceutical grade nicotine to the lungs as an aerosol. It is licensed to aid smokers wishing to quit or reduce prior to quitting, to assist smokers who are unwilling or unable to smoke, and as a safer alternative to smoking for smokers and those around them. Voke is indicated in pregnant and lactating women making a quit attempt. It was launched on the UK market in October 2019.³ At the time of writing, the Voke inhaler is not listed in the Drug Tariff. The Voke inhaler is listed on the NHS Business Services Authority DM&D website as a GSL product, at an NHS indicative cost of £8 for a 20 dose pack.⁴

East of England Clinical Commissioning Groups support the NICE Stop smoking interventions and services guideline,⁵ and support the prescribing of nicotine replacement therapy only when used as part of a formal smoking cessation programme.

Patients currently managed by local smoking cessation services are able to receive licensed nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) products that are approved for use and listed on local formularies, when prescribed during a smoking cessation attempt by the user for a defined period of time along with on-going support, either at the cost of a prescription charge or free of charge. Patients not receiving support would however need to purchase NRT from any of the available outlets for these products.

Unless part of a commissioned stop smoking service, General Practitioners are not expected to

prescribe NRT products for their patients and if asked, should either encourage self-care or refer to one of the locally commissioned smoking cessation services.

A Public Health England review of the evidence for e-cigarettes (EC) states that combining EC (the most popular source of support used by smokers in the general population), with stop smoking service support (the most effective type of support), should be a recommended option available to all smokers.⁶

Currently there is no licensed EC available in the UK and patients are advised to buy them from specialist vape shops, some pharmacies and other retailers, or on the internet.⁶

As with all other medicines and devices, the underling commissioning principle that new treatments should be assessed for funding according to the basic principles of clinical effectiveness, safety and cost effectiveness within an ethical framework that supports consistent decision making, applies to the Voke inhaler, and any e-cigarettes or other novel nicotine containing products that are licensed in the future.

It is therefore recommended that e-cigarettes and other novel nicotine containing products only be considered for funding as part of a formal smoking cessation program once they have been fully evaluated, their place in therapy established, and formulary processes have been followed.

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Document history

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References

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