



NUFFIELD DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY CARE
HEALTH SCIENCES

Developing and testing peer-led interventions to promote switching from smoking to vaping

Applications are invited from individuals with a strong academic record who wish to develop a career in behavioural or primary care research. The student will join the thriving **Health Behaviours team** in the **Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences** who are working on range of interventions to support harm reduction and smoking cessation.

The project

The rise in popularity of electronic cigarettes ('e-cigarettes') in recent years has been accompanied by a growth in the number of virtual 'vaper' communities, with people sharing their advice and experiences of e-cigarettes with peers on internet support groups and discussion forums, many of which address ways of reducing or stopping smoking. The rise of peer to peer support is unique to e-cigarettes; no other means of stopping or reducing smoking attracts such passionate engagement from members of the public. This raises the possibility that we could better harness this peer support to enable more people to reduce or stop smoking using e-cigarettes and this project examines this.

The first study in this project will be a systematic review looking at the effects of online peer support for harm reduction and smoking cessation. The aim will be to systematically identify studies using online peer support for harm reduction or smoking cessation; to review the key characteristics of these peer groups to determine the mechanisms by which and the extent to which they change users' smoking; and to assess their methodological quality.

The second study will use data collected from the ERASE trial to understand the experiences of peer supporters and new e-cigarette users. The ERASE trial is a three-year programme incorporating a randomised controlled trial testing the effectiveness of GP and nurse promotion of e-cigarettes for promoting use and uptake of e-cigarettes in smokers with smoking-related chronic diseases. Patients in the trial have no intention of stopping smoking but are given an e-cigarette by their GP or nurse in an attempt to switch from cigarettes to e-cigarettes. Those who accept the offer of an e-cigarette are given access to a telephone helpline and a study-dedicated online support forum led by experienced vapers. This study will involve a content-driven analysis of data from the online peer support forum and audio-recordings of the telephone support to identify what concerns new vapers have and how they respond to reassurances offered by peer supporters, and to understand which components of support are effective and how this can be maximised. In-depth qualitative interviews will be conducted with peer supporters from the ERASE trial to explore their approach to interacting with and supporting new users. Interviews will also be conducted with new potential vapers to understand their experiences of online peer support and reasons for using the online support forum.

Building on the first and second study, the third study will involve developing and testing a vaping support website featuring an online peer-led support forum for new vapers. The study will assess how many new users opt in and use the forum and switch from cigarettes to e-cigarettes and the value of peer support.

NIHR School for Primary Care Research (SPCR) funding is available to fund the university and college fees and provide a generous stipend (tax-free allowance) of £16,000/year plus a small allowance for research expenses and training: <https://www.phc.ox.ac.uk/study/dphil-and-msc-by-research/available-studentships-are-listed-below/nspcr-studentship>. Students with overseas fee status are welcome to apply for this funding but will need to fund the remainder of their fees from alternative sources. The candidates applying for this studentship funding will be in competition with others who may be applying for other doctoral research programmes.

Supervisors: **Dr Rachna Begh** and **Professor Paul Aveyard** and **Dr John Powell**

Interested applicants should, in the first instance, discuss their interest with Dr Rachna Begh at rachna.begh@phc.ox.ac.uk and attach a CV.

Thereafter students will apply to the University of Oxford using the general **online application** for the programme title "DPhil in Primary Health Care".

