I am the manager of the stop smoking service for Leicester. Over three years ago, we saw the potential for e-cigarettes and personal vaporisers to help people stop smoking, and were the first ecig-friendly stop smoking service in the world.

We are a service that listens to what our service users say, and we build our programmes based on what works best. Since taking an ecig-friendly approach, we have been delighted to see consistently better than average results with vaping, either with or without nicotine replacement therapy (NRT).

Each year, we have seen increasing numbers of smokers quit with vaping.

In 2014-15, we saw 293 smokers use ecigs, of whom 180 quit (61% success rate, compared with 47% success for those using NRT)
In 2015-16, we saw 752 smokers use ecigs, of whom 487 quit (65% success rate, compared with 45% for those using NRT)
In 2016-17, we saw 851 smokers use ecigs, of whom 512 quit (60% success rate, compared with 45% for those using NRT)

This appears consistent with the results from other services who have taken a similar approach, as reported in NHS Digital’s stop smoking service statistics.

Our advice to those stopping smoking with ecigs is that it is their choice whether they continue to vape – the nicotine they get from their vaporiser could be exactly what stops them relapsing to smoking, and it’s the smoke that kills.

The key difference that we see among service users who have switched to vaping though is their increased confidence in their determination never to smoke again. Most have tried many, many times before, with medicinal products, or by willpower alone, and have relapsed to smoking. Vaping has made a difference that has taken them (and often their families) by surprise.

We have not had a single ex-smoker/now vaper talk of any ill-effects from vaping apart from the occasional dry throat, which can be fixed with a change of liquid. Most have reported better health outcomes (more energy, breathing easier, improved stamina, less need to take medication for other conditions).

Flavours have been important, with the majority of service users choosing fruit flavours in preference to tobacco flavours.

The other unexpected benefit has been their enthusiasm for ‘converting’ other smokers in their family and social circle. One of my team told me recently that all her vaping quitters are turning into stop-smoking advisors, as they encourage their family and friends to give it a go.

Even highly dependent smokers such as those with poor mental health, and homeless people, are doing really well with vaping. Nursing staff in the mental health wards who were initially sceptical about vaping have been pleasantly surprised at how much easier it has been for their patients who have started using a vaporiser to manage their nicotine needs.

There is a need to emphasise the potential benefits, in order to counteract both the misinformation that smokers hear from the media, and to give confidence to policy-makers, who tend to err on the side of precaution and restrictions, thereby wasting opportunities to get smokers switching to a far safer product.

Only this month, one of my team was discussing switching to vaping with a smoker who truly believed (because his hospital consultant had told him so) that smoking was a safer option; I believe the world is frittering away the chance of seeing the end of smoking in our lifetime by suppressing the truth about the differential risk and by a frenzy of research trying to prove theoretical harms.

I hope this inquiry will go a long way towards giving all interested groups, both here and abroad, the leadership that will saves many, many lives.

December 2017