

E-cigarette use: a survey study evaluating perspectives of Head and Neck Surgeons

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Background

E-cigarettes are increasingly popular devices that aerosolize a solution, known as E-liquid, which contains nicotine. They have been controversially considered a novel tool for smoking cessation. Studies assessing their effectiveness as a smoking cessation aid and their long-term effects are lacking.

Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR) is a concept that aims to decrease the negative effects from the use of combustible cigarettes by substituting alternative nicotine products, including e-cigarettes. The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of head and neck cancer (HNC) surgeons regarding their tobacco cessation practices, e-cigarette counselling and attitudes towards the use of e-cigarettes as an alternative to conventional cigarettes.

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to identify the perspectives of head and neck cancer (HNC) surgeons regarding their tobacco cessation practices, e-cigarette counselling and attitudes towards the use of e-cigarettes as an alternative to conventional cigarettes.

Methods

- Cross-sectional, IRB approved, 10-question multiple choice survey study, free text options, was administered via an electronic survey.
- Approved by the American Head and Neck Society (AHNS), the survey was sent out to members of AHNS via their email listserv.

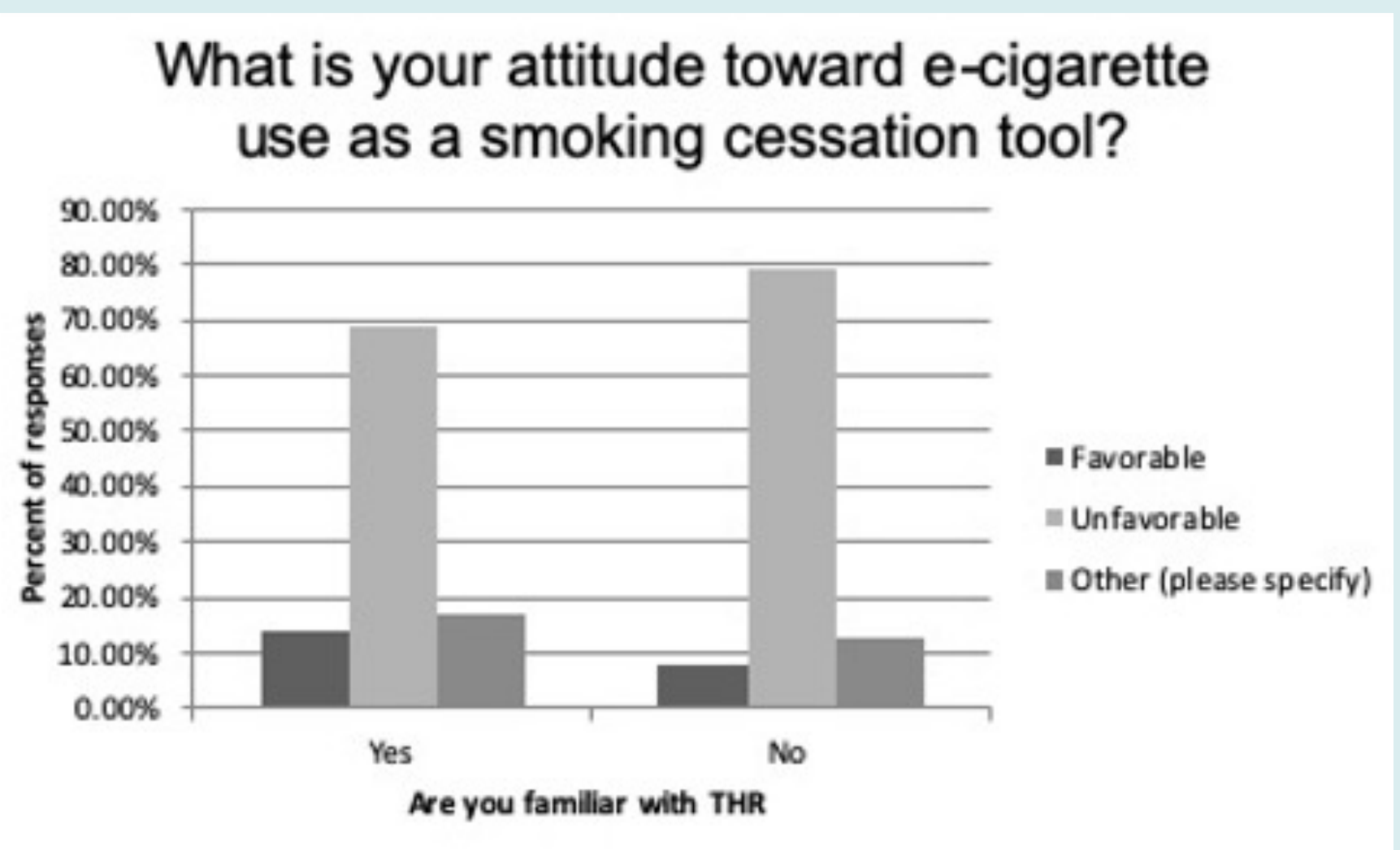
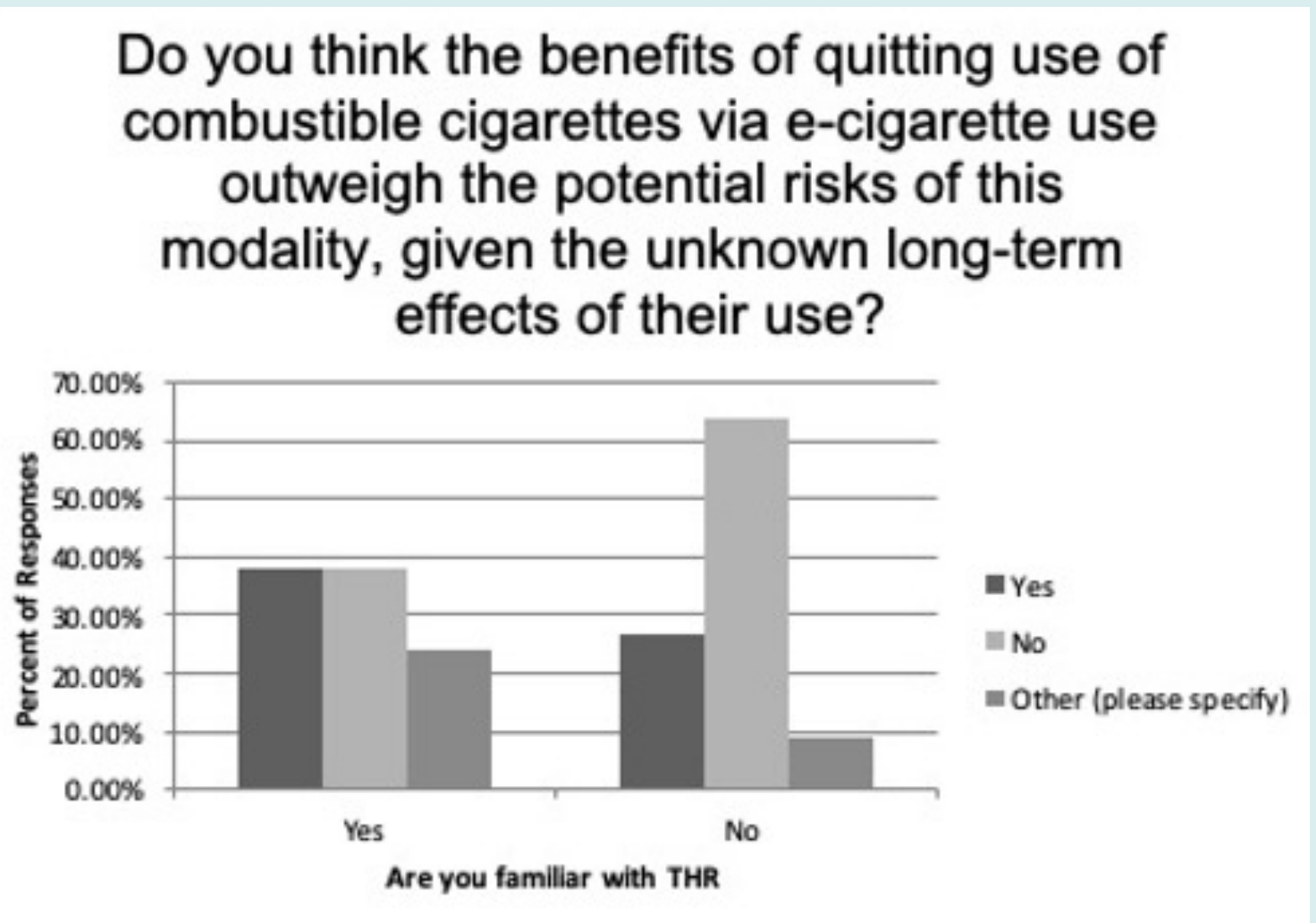
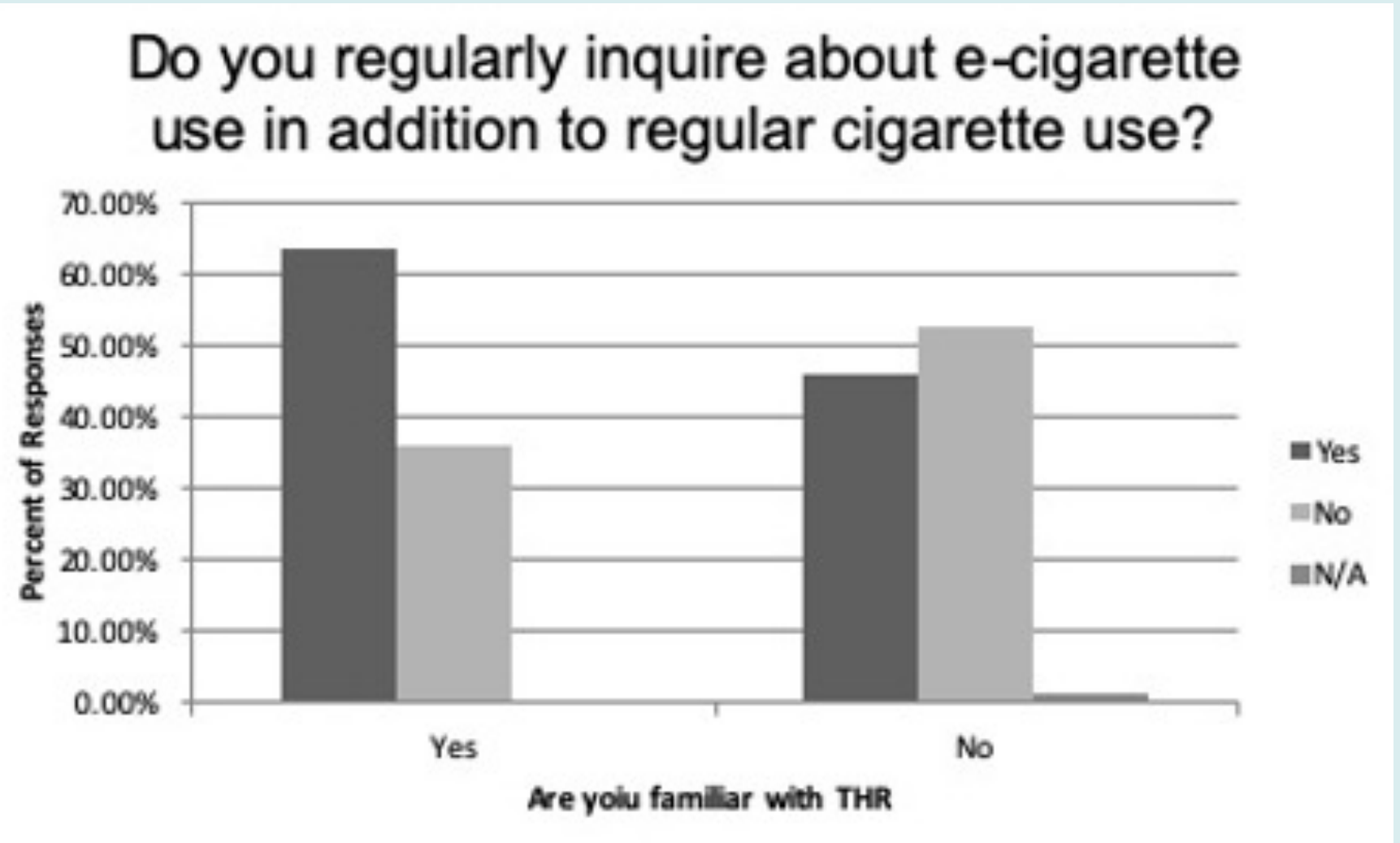
Results

- Response rate 136 (15.10%)
- 102 (75.00%) had an unfavorable attitude towards e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool
- Most popular smoking cessation methods recommend nicotine replacement 107 (77%) and pharmacotherapy 96 (71%).
- 78 (57.35%) were not familiar with the concept of THR
- Those familiar with THR, 37 (63.79%) routinely inquire about e-cigarette use. Of those unfamiliar with THR, 36 (46.15%) routinely inquired about e-cigarette use,
- 72 (53%) did not believe the benefits of quitting smoking outweigh the potential long-term effects of e-cigarettes, and 19 (14%) were unsure, citing the lack of evidence.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of survey respondents	
Characteristics	N (%)
Professional title	
Attending	119 (87.50)
Fellow	5 (3.68)
Resident	3 (2.21)
Nurse Practitioner	0 (0)
Physician's Assistant	4 (2.94)
Other	5 (3.68)
Average number of head and neck cancer patients diagnose/treat per month	
0	0 (0)
1-50	90 (66.18)
51-100	33 (24.26)
>100	13 (9.56)
N/A	0 (0)
Average number of head and neck primary vs recurrent disease diagnose/treat per month	
0	0 (0)
1-50	116 (85.29)
51-100	13 (9.56)
>100	2 (1.47)
N/A	5 (3.68%)

Table 2 Clinician smoking cessation practices and attitudes towards e-cigarettes	
Characteristics	N (%)
Which methods do you recommend to aid patients in smoking cessation	
Nicotine replacement therapy	107 (76.68)
Pharmacotherapy	96 (70.59)
E-cigarettes	10 (7.35)
Chewing tobacco	5 (3.68)
None	12 (8.82)
Other	38 (27.94)
What is your attitude toward e-cigarette use as a smoking cessation tool	
Favorable	14 (10.29)
Unfavorable	102 (75.00)
Other	20 (14.71)
Do you think the benefits of quitting combustible cigarettes via e-cigarette use outweigh the potential risks of this modality, given the unknown long-term effects of their use?	
Yes	43 (31.62)
No	72 (52.94)
Other	21 (15.44)
As a tool for smoking cessation, do you routinely recommend e-cigarette use to patients?	
Yes	5 (3.68)
No	130 (95.59)
N/A	1 (0.74)
Do you regularly inquire about e-cigarette use in addition to regular cigarette use?	
Yes	73 (53.68)
No	62 (45.59)
N/A	1 (0.74)
Are you familiar with the principle of Tobacco Harm Reduction (THR)?	
Yes	58 (42.65)
No	78 (57.35)
Of patients who use e-cigarettes, what is their most common experience?	
Favorable	71 (52.21)
Unfavorable	12 (8.82)
N/A	53 (38.97)

- When asked if clinicians think the benefits of quitting combustible cigarettes via e-cigarette use outweigh the potential risks of this modality, given unknown long-term effects; the other group, 19 (13.97%) stated they were unsure due to lack of evidence and data.



Conclusion

- Head and neck cancer specialists have an unfavorable attitude towards e-cigarettes.
- Lack of data and evidence regarding e-cigarettes and their role in smoking cessation is also recognized.
- Head and neck surgeons familiar with THR were more likely to inquire about patient e-cigarette use. They were also less likely to have a definitive opinion on the benefits of quitting combustible cigarettes.
- Results suggest that provider familiarity with THR influences their patient discussions on smoking cessation and e-cigarettes.
- Further studies on the long-term effects of e-cigarettes are needed for providers to better counsel their patients.

Acknowledgements

1. AHNS Prevention & Early Detection Committee Position Statement on E-Cigarette Use. American Head & Neck Society, July 2016.
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3. Luxton NA, Shih P, Rahman MA. Electronic Cigarettes and Smoking Cessation in the Perioperative Period of Cardiothoracic Surgery: Views of Australian Clinicians. International journal of environmental research and public health 2018;15.
4. Pericot-Valverde I, Gaalema DE, Priest JS, Higgins ST. E-cigarette awareness, perceived harmfulness, and ever use among U.S. adults. Preventive medicine 2017;104:92-9.