

WHILE THE WORLD VAPES OUR GOVERNMENT CHOKES

Australia

By Kevin Glancy

'I'm supposed to be dead yet, despite the government's best efforts, I'm still alive and well.'

The prognosis was grim. A heavy smoker for fifty plus years, my lung capacity had been reduced to 41%. The way they explained it, was that the lung is like a sponge and most of mine was useless, drenched in thick black tar. There was no coming back. Over half of my lung was, to all intents and purposes dead and more of it would soon die.

The prognosis? Seven to ten years. By then I would be at best, dragging an oxygen tank around or I too, much like my lungs, would be dead. That was in 2008 – ten years ago.

Did I quit? No. Was I stupid? Yes. Sure! I tried everything. Patches, gum, you name it but still I couldn't quit. Why?

The 'why I couldn't quit' is important. It goes beyond the addiction and it's a battle every smoker faces when attempting to quit. You will always find a lifestyle reason why not to quit and it's the one thing that governments underestimate. They will give a heroin addict methadone as a replacement for heroin but they won't allow a smoker nicotine to replace the poisons in chemically reinforced tobacco. Both drugs are just as addictive. They do allow nicotine in patches and gum but they are passive responses and while they might work for some, they do not provide a physical alternative to holding a cigarette.

So what was my lifestyle reason and why was holding a

cigarette important? In my case I live a solitary life inside my head. I'm very fortunate, blessed with an Irish heritage albeit without the luck but God's been kind. So many adventures, those priceless ones you just can't buy. If I wrote about them no one would believe me. I've survived and it's taken me many years to get here but now I'm able to spend most of my time creating; drawing on the roads I've travelled for inspiration. I've always been a song writer as I've worn my way through a variety of salaried occupations but I also write books under a pseudonym and articles like this one.

Leaving the studio to have a smoke has always been part of the creative process. In my world it was critical. Sounds silly, I know. But holding a cigarette was like flicking a switch; a time to leave the scene of the accident; to get some perspective; five minutes set aside for objectivity.

Puffing away while I paced back and forth, I'd ask myself, am I saying what I think I'm saying? Can the verse or the chorus be better? What about the drum fill, the bass line, the guitar solo? What about that sentence? Is the rhythm right? Can that paragraph be better? While I relaxed my brain with a smoke, ideas would form and when the cigarette was finished, I'd rush back into the studio to put my objectivity to good use.

It was all part of what is an exciting time. When you're in the zone nothing else matters. To be able to be fully focused; to shut everything else out while you create something that never existed before is a priceless gift. It's like the universe has turned on a tap and your job is to make sure you don't waste a drop.

If you're not there with the bucket when it happens it's gone. Being in the zone is critical. Cigarettes and cups of tea helped me to stay in the zone. They were part of the formula and the ability to create is more important to me than just about anything. It's also how addiction works. You justify things that are bad for you.

If I stop smoking I'll lose it. It's the Holy Grail! Don't muck with it. Besides! I'm dying I told myself. It's terminal so why bother? Too late to turn back now, isn't it?

My lung specialist wanted me to quit but didn't nag. He said quitting would make me less vulnerable to infection but he also told me that he could do no more for me. A good man, he empathised; understood why smoking held me in a vice-like grip. As he closed my file he gave me one final tip that might weaken that grip. *'Try an e-cigarette.'*

I heard him say it; I was surprised he said it. He could get himself into trouble for saying things like that, it's not PC. The village elders want them banned but fool me, I still didn't take his advice. Not then.

It took another year before the day came and I couldn't breathe. It's a scary thing when you know the physics. You know what you have to do to breathe but you just can't do it. The ambulance was called and with typical dedication and skill the paramedics saved me. They would do that again three weeks later. I was in real trouble. Hospitalised with pneumonia for the second time in a matter of weeks. I was ashamed. It was all my fault.

If I fall down I don't expect anyone to pick me up. Never have but these good folk, paramedics, doctors and nurses had given me their valuable time, saved my life and that's when the idiot inside my head lost the argument. My specialist's words finally hit home. *'Try an e-cigarette.'* So I did.

My personal war against addiction started on St Patrick's Day, March 17th 2016. I picked that day on purpose. It was my marker and I wouldn't forget it. My weapon of choice? A vaporiser with some liquid nicotine mixed in with the flavoured liquid. Maybe I was finally blessed by Irish luck, for twas a memorable day to be sure.

Not least because on that day I was finally able to quit that stupid and dangerous smoking habit. I had something to hold and to puff on. It wasn't a passive nicotine patch, it was physical and vaping replaced the cigarette. I was able to leave the studio and puff on something that helped me to concentrate on being objective just like before. I hadn't lost the formula that kept me in the zone. The lifestyle reason had been stubbed out. That was three years ago and even though I'm surrounded by smokers, I haven't smoked a cigarette since.

But was vaping any safer? Was I swapping one poison for another?

I got the answer recently when I had a lung capacity test. Felt like an astronaut in a glass cage being tested for a space flight. I thought I might have failed the test and was anxious to know whether I'd ever fly again but I had to wait two more weeks to find out.

'C'mon Doc! Tell me. How bad is it? How long do you think I've got?'

The doctor had the results but was perplexed. I can understand why. My lung capacity should have been a lot less than 41% in fact, it had increased dramatically to an amazing 82%. Almost normal for a non-smoker at my age let alone for a former professional smoker like me. The icing on the cake; my internal oxygen levels were at 99%.

You might say it was a miracle. Maybe it was. To me the miracle is that after nearly sixty years I had managed to break the smoking spell. Not only that; thanks to vaping I have absolutely no desire to ever smoke again and I feel great. Each day I wake up feeling good and that's quite something when all it takes is a look in the mirror to confirm it. You know you're much closer to the end than the beginning. It's a growing old thing but looks can be deceiving.

Until I started vaping I never knew a day beyond the age of

sixty when I woke up feeling good. For those who know their movies, these days I feel like Benjamin Button, getting younger as I roar around the neighbourhood on my pushbike.

More importantly, my lung specialist could find no detrimental effects from three years of vaping. He could hear a pin drop when he did his thing on my chest with his stethoscope. It used to sound like surf's up at Bondi Beach. Thanks to nicotine in an e-cigarette, not anymore.

I wanted to yell from the rooftops. *'Smokers! Follow me! There is a way out.'*

You can imagine my anger when, on October 16th, 2017 an arrogant Liberal Health Minister, Greg Hunt, a supposed servant of the people, said that he will never lift the ban on e-cigarettes. *"It's not going to be happening on my watch as far as I'm concerned."*

It appears that he'd rather 19,000 people die each year due to smoking related illness than to help save lives. Minister! Find your brain and look beyond your nose. Puffing on just about anything is safer than a cigarette.

While the Australian federal government maintains the ban on nicotine e-cigarettes, many lives are being saved because of their use overseas. The advent of the nicotine e-cig has provided a much more sustainable solution for the smoker trying to quit. Judging by the overseas experience it suggests that if our government embraced the concept, the end of tobacco could be nigh. But still they dither like the fools they are.

The effectiveness of e-cigs in the fight against tobacco products in the UK, US, EU, NZ and Canada is indisputable. In the UK, health experts from Public Health England (PHE) have recommended that due to the benefits of vaping and e-cigs that they should be subsidised and made available on the National

Health Service (NHS) which is the equivalent of Australia's Pharmaceutical Medical Scheme.

They even recommend that they should be sold in hospital shops along with other quit smoking aids. Media reports claim that vaping has led to half a million people quitting in the last year in the US and the UK. Similar results are expected this year. As someone who has benefited from vaping it's easy to understand why. A recent Reuters/IPSOS poll of US adults found that 7.35 million smokers; that's 30% of the 24.5 million e-cig and vaporiser users have stopped smoking and are currently vaping instead.

In a study in 2014, nearly 30,000 people were surveyed in the EU and it was estimated that 6 million smokers had quit smoking by vaping. It is a more effective quit smoking aid than any other on the market.

In the UK, PHE is campaigning to persuade smokers to switch to an e-cig while here in the big village we call Australia, the elders do their best to discourage this life saving initiative.

It's an attitude that's tantamount to manslaughter. In Australia, that quit figure could be as high as 500,000, according to leading tobacco treatment expert and NSW University Associate Conjoint Professor, Dr Colin Mendelsohn who said.

"If a government agency in the UK can throw its support behind e-cigarettes to save British lives, then surely the Australian government can move to save Australian ones too. Australia needs to reverse its ban on nicotine-containing e-cigarettes and promote their use."

The government's double standard is clearly evident when you observe its willingness to embrace medical cannabis and the operation of state government sponsored, safe injection rooms for heroin users. Both programmes are based on illegal

products and in the case of heroin, supported due to the policy of harm reduction.

Yet in comparison, the government's recalcitrance and hypocrisy when dealing with smokers who want to quit with nicotine e-cigarettes is astounding. State governments also prove how vindictive and merciless they are when they group e-cigs with tobacco products in legislated bans. There is absolutely no comparison between the two.

In simple terms: Cigarettes emit smoke which lingers in the air. An e-cigarette does not emit smoke. It produces vapour which rapidly evaporates. It's almost logistically impossible for a bystander to be affected by the vapour and UK studies confirm that fact.

Public Health England (PHE) reviewed studies into the passive exposure to vapour from nicotine e-cigarettes. Following a review of all the evidence medical experts found that;

'Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) release negligible levels of nicotine into ambient air with no identified health risks to bystanders'.

The UK Royal College of Physicians also agrees with that perspective and recommended that doctors advise patients who want to quit smoking to switch to vaping.

The Australian government's passive smoking argument in relation to vapour from e-cigarettes lacks proof or common sense. Of course breathing anywhere can be a risky business and I'd be less concerned about the risk of relatively harmless, evaporating vapour than many other places where we have no choice but to breathe in static germ filled or polluted air.

A cruise ship elevator is the classic harbinger of international germs. Then there's standing on the side of the road breathing in carbon monoxide fumes. Your department store

perfume department is a worry. Who knows what poisons are lurking within that overpowering misty odour that you have to walk through to get into the store. The list goes on. Doctor's waiting rooms, hospital wards; airports, the lift in your office building. Wherever people gather. We're even told that new car upholstery is carcinogenic.

As for an epidemic of the vapers? Those UK health expert studies also found e-cigarette use among adults who have never smoked, at less than one per cent of all users. As a counter to the 'young people will use them' argument'; those same reviews found that e-cigarettes are attracting very few young people who have never smoked.

A Public Health England 2019 report revealed that vaping is confined almost exclusively to smokers and ex-smokers. Regular vaping by non-smoking teens is very rare; less than 2 in one thousand in the UK (PHE 2019) and less than 3 in a thousand in the US (Farsalinos 2018).

There is evidence from the US and the UK that in any event, there is a direct link between an increase in vaping and a reduction in cigarette smoking. Surely that's a step in a much healthier direction.

I believe that adults (governments) constantly telling young people not to smoke is like telling the cat not to eat the cream. Teenagers by nature are curious and rebellious. If your parents tell you not to do something because it's bad for you then it's code for, 'it must be good, where can I get some?'

My father threatened to kill me if he ever caught me with a cigarette and a few days later I was behind the garage with some mates with a Woodbine in my hand. That's how I started. I'm quite sure if he'd rammed a cigarette in my mouth that I would have coughed and fainted. My curiosity would have been appeased and it would have strengthened me against peer group pressure.

'Been there done that. It's horrible!

That's what happened with beer. As a youngster I tried a slug from an almost empty bottle on the sly, hated the bitter taste, no longer curious, I never touched it again for years.

I would suggest that telling kids not to smoke is possibly why the quit numbers have stalled. If curious young folk are going to smoke, then wouldn't an e-cigarette be much safer than a cigarette? Teenagers will experiment whether we adults like it or not. Let's at least try to minimise harm.

You would think that politicians might learn something from their taxpayer funded, overseas study tours, but clearly they haven't. In many countries including the US, UK, Europe and Canada the use of e-cigs and vaping has been a revelation. It's one that medical professionals have adopted in many places as the preferred quit smoking choice with extraordinary results to support their enthusiasm.

Yet here, arguments against vaping are based on ideology and possible risks. It's speculation and not science. That vaping may be unsafe; that vaping is a pathway to smoking for young people; that the vapour emitted while using the product indoors, may not be harmless, but there is no hard evidence to support any of those arguments.

In any event; not much humans ever do is safe. We're accident prone. Harm reduction is as much as we can do to save us from ourselves. The Government continues to employ stalling tactics. Mere projections. Meanwhile more people lose an opportunity to quit smoking. Greg Hunt fiddles, Rome burns – More lives are lost.

Studies reveal: Vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking.

According to Professor John Newton, Director of health improvement at the UK government agency, Public Health England following a comprehensive review into vaping he stated.

"Our new review reinforces the finding that vaping is a fraction of the risk of smoking, at least 95 per cent less harmful, and of negligible risk to bystanders."

In a logical world, a harm reduction approach to smoking would be a natural. It's a policy applied to illegal heroin users so why not do the same for smokers who consume a legal product which is just as addictive?

Allowing nicotine to be retained while eliminating tobacco's other dangerous additives for a smoker trying to quit seems a logical course of action. It's certainly not a big stretch compared to implementing taxpayer funded, heroin-injecting rooms. It seems we can be compassionate about users of an illegal drug yet intolerant when it comes to those trying to break the addiction to what is still a legal product. We treat them like pariahs.

Science, logic and common sense dictate that puffing on an e-cig is much safer than a cigarette in which nicotine is reinforced by dangerous poisons and chemicals. It should be encouraged and embraced by the anti-smoking lobby and government. E-cigs do not contain the vast majority of those chemicals.

Nicotine on its own is relatively harmless. It is not a carcinogen and does not cause respiratory disease. In my own case it gave me quitting power and led to dramatic respiratory improvement by replacing cigarettes with a vaporiser.

Australia is the only western democracy to ban the sale and use of nicotine vaping products. These products are legal in the UK, US, EU, Canada and New Zealand.

Back in Australia, vaping advocate and Liberal Democrats leader Senator David Leyonhjelm said the Australian government ban on e-cigarettes had lost all credibility in the face of the UK medical reports. The Senator believes that;

"Health Minister Greg Hunt has been held hostage by a group of

so-called public health experts who are ideologically opposed to e-cigarettes, despite now irrefutable evidence that these products are saving thousands of lives."

Maybe I'm too cynical but why is the government so reluctant to seize the day and help smokers who are desperately trying to quit? Who are the politicians trying to protect?

Is it the cigarette manufactures? Is it the makers of other less effective quit smoking aids? Is it because smokers are a cash cow? *'Let's not help them quit we need the tax revenue.'* Wouldn't be surprised. The high cost of a pack of cigarettes is mainly consumed by tax.

Smokers pay more in personal tax than any other individual in Australia. It's the poor who feel it most. Sure it's bad for them but beyond a beer and a smoke, there's not much else to look forward to. Do Labor and Liberal care? No!

Official Budget papers for 2017-18 reveal that in that year alone, smokers contributed at least \$12.5 billion annually to government coffers. Every financial year smokers provide a huge windfall for the government and this amount continues to increase each year. If its quit smoking strategies were working, the tax take would not be that high. However, in every annual budget they estimate how much they expect from smoking taxes. It's not mere speculation, politicians know they can count on it. The Budget papers reveal that governments use smokers for revenue. They are not helping smokers to quit.

The non-smoker doesn't appreciate the huge financial contribution smokers make to their non-smoking lives. It's tax revenue they would otherwise have to pay. If all smokers quit tomorrow, the government would need to find that money somewhere else. Yet whenever there's a tax increase on cigarettes, many chortle and sneer.

Non-smokers shouldn't be so quick to applaud. The lack of

objection to the high taxing regime on cigarettes has given governments a licence to put a high tax on anything they deem is bad for us. Even if you don't smoke, your preferred poison will be next. Junk food, sugar, soft drinks and of course who can forget Kevin Rudd's tax on alco-pops? It did nothing to reduce consumption but sent drinkers off to find a cheaper brew.

The billions of dollars contributed by smokers every year to the welfare of this country and its citizens should be dedicated to curing cancer or building hospitals but it isn't. It's lost in consolidated revenue. Government figures bandied about due to health related smoking costs are a furphy. It's so easy to insult other non-smoking cancer sufferers by throwing them into the smoker's pile.

Government ad campaigns infer that if you don't smoke, you won't get cancer. It's a false narrative. Smoking is deadly but; if only it was that simple. It's true that one in five cancer deaths are attributed to smoking but the causes of the other four out of five deaths due to cancer are varied and sometimes it's hereditary, whether you smoke or not. The irony? Given the overseas results, the one in five deaths due to smoking could be dramatically reduced by an advert promoting nicotine e-cigarettes.

In 1999 I did some extensive research. The high taxing war had already been going for a few years. I predicted that, as the tax on cigarettes increased, tobacco would replace illegal drugs at the top of the burglar's list of reasons to break into somebody's home as well as service stations, hotels etc. I predicted that illegal tobacco sales (chop-chop) would increase dramatically; it would tax government authorities both in prevention costs and in the loss of tobacco tax. I was right on all counts.

Back then, there were an estimated 3.3 million smokers in Australia. They were already paying 4.2 times the cost of

health related illnesses in tobacco tax. The tax take on cigarettes has steadily increased in the 18 years since, yet today there are still an estimated 3 million smokers in the country. Doesn't say much for the high taxing/plain packaging strategies when you consider how few have quit. Looks much worse when more than likely, a percentage of those representing that small reduction in numbers didn't actually quit but sadly passed away due to a variety of medical reasons.

Labor's Nicola Roxon introduced plain packaging without any supporting evidence that it actually worked. It revealed nothing more than a complete lack of street smarts and as far as what lurked between her ears? – Nothing much. Drug addicts don't care what their drugs come in. You could put cigarettes in a brown paper bag for all they care. As long as the ciggies don't get crushed, it wouldn't matter what the packet looked like.

Around the same time, during Julia Gillard's time at the top, her Labor government actually forced cigarette manufacturers to put more chemicals in the tobacco to make cigarettes burn quicker. Bugger the health impact. More tax revenue, you see. A cigarette didn't last as long so smokers had to buy more cigarettes. Smokers might remember when your cigarettes began to burn away quicker than before. You could see clumps of tobacco glowing red like a burning bush.

In Australia, while politicians rub their hands with glee over the tax take, the current anti-smoking strategies have run out of steam. Things have stalled. As for the 3 million smokers puffing away? I often think that if just a small percentage of those voters united, what damage they could do in Australian elections. Labor and Liberal would be no more. Vapers should unite behind politicians who genuinely support legalising nicotine e-cigarettes.

The backward progressives

The tragedy is that if governments are serious about their quit smoking campaigns surely it's time to try something new. Unlike tobacco smoke, puffing on an e-cig is a demonstration of respect for other people's space. It's relatively inoffensive and a mark of progress; the civilised way forward in hopefully, a more tolerant and hospitable future.

Humans are flawed and history shows that our attraction to drugs has and will continue to be a constant. Smoking is often compared to heroin addiction. It should be. Kicking the habit is not easy. Those non-smokers, lacking in compassion or understanding, glibly suggest to smokers; *'why don't you go 'cold turkey?'* *'You know it's stupid so why don't you just stop?'*

If only it were that simple. For some people it can be however, many try and fail and long term success is not guaranteed, regardless of the existing quit smoking approaches used. The overseas experience proves conclusively that e-cigarettes are extremely effective weapons in the arsenal of quit smoking aids. However, nicotine is critical to that success. It presents the means to quit for good. The use of the phrase 'for good' is deliberate.

For many smokers who quit using nicotine patches, gum etc. it's a temporary gesture. A bit like being on parole only to re-offend. Many people I know who have managed to maintain their abstinence still miss a cigarette 15 and 20 years on. One dear friend, who hasn't smoked for over thirty years, likes to hang around smokers just to take in the 'air'. Another two lasted seven and nine years respectively only to return to the smoking fold. Others only manage a few months, a few weeks, a few days before they're back on it. It's a revolving door. Give up one day with the best of intentions start again the next.

This is the stranglehold that cigarettes have in terms of an addiction and it should not be underestimated and highlights

the importance of relatively harmless nicotine as an agent in the fight against that addiction. It's allowed in tobacco and in quit smoking aids such as nicotine patches, gum and spray so why not in the more effective e-cigarette. In the serious task of overcoming an addiction it provides staying power and I speak from personal experience. I am living proof.

Forget my big win. Doctor Colin Mendelsohn also confirmed that a recent large, high quality randomised controlled trial found that vaping was nearly twice as effective as nicotine replacement products in helping smokers quit. No surprise there.

Why is a nicotine e-cigarette so effective as a quit smoking aid?

The reason an e-cigarette is so effective as a quitting tool is that it does the one thing that no other quit smoking aid does. It provides a physical solution which you can't achieve with a nicotine patch. It gives the 'smoker' something to hold and to puff on which is inoffensive to the non-smoker. It's like holding a harmless cigarette. More importantly it reduces the anxiety when missing the cigarette.

It shuts up that voice inside your head, the one that keeps demanding; *'go on have another cigarette. Go on!'* The physical act of puffing on a nicotine e-cigarette strengthens the resolve of the person trying to quit. *'I can puff on this I don't need to puff on a cigarette.'*

The use of nicotine liquid in an e-cigarette is the critical factor. It calms the nerves and it's the key to overcoming the addiction to tobacco. Although nicotine is the main addictive chemical in a cigarette, it's reinforced by other chemicals. By removing those and allowing the use of some nicotine in an e-cig it may well be the beginning of the end for tobacco consumption. Another reason why intolerant non-smokers, the anti-smoking lobby and governments should be on side.

You use a few drops of nicotine in your flavoured liquid mix which is heated by a battery to produce the vapour. Having left tobacco behind you've almost completely eliminated those harmful and addictive tobacco chemicals. It means that you can now control your nicotine intake. It's your last link to cigarettes and you can gradually reduce its presence in the e-cig over time. The benefit is that the nicotine helps you to withstand the temptation to reach for a cigarette. In the early stages of quitting it's the point of difference. It's how quitting can be sustained.

In practice, nicotine fortifies your willpower and ultimately removes your need and desire to ever smoke again. Some medical scientists believe that nicotine, a mild stimulant, is so harmless that those trying to quit smoking should use more of it and not less. That even using it over a longer period will have little or no detrimental effect and more importantly will keep you away from the far more dangerous poisons you would otherwise inhale from puffing on a cigarette.

Our government through the Therapeutic Goods Administration, those public servants who work for us, refuse to bend. A recent application to remove nicotine from the poison's lists for use in e-cigs was resisted.

Like the Minister Greg 'Choker' Hunt, the TGA boffins obviously prefer that people continue to die due to smoking related diseases each year than try something else. Not even a trial. To resist the recognition of nicotine as an agent in the fight against tobacco addiction borders on cruelty. It shows a complete lack of understanding or compassion for the smoker trying to quit. Particularly given the acceptance of the harm reduction approaches to illegal drugs. It's certainly a puzzling attitude, when measured next to the positive overseas experience.

As for smoking? Hopefully it will soon be confined to history but some empathy and support for those who are trying to break

the habit with a transition to safer nicotine e-cigs, would be helpful and it would hasten the demise of tobacco. Instead the intolerant continue to treat smokers like second class citizens; content to encourage them to contribute more and more money to government coffers.

When so many lives can be saved like my own has been, at least until that big Mack truck comes along, the government should act now without any delay. If they don't they are clearly not serious in the fight against smoking.

Footnote:

The opinions in this article are my own but my thanks to Doctor Colin Mendelsohn for his invaluable advice and advocacy. You can learn more about vaping at; www.athra.org.au

My thanks also to Donna for her assistance and enthusiasm. A good lady who shuns publicity, but like the thousands of other passionate Australian vapers, is fighting to see an end to the government's stubborn and ill-informed reluctance to embrace this important lifesaving solution.

A civilised country cannot be so, unless it is hospitable and its citizens are free to take responsibility for their own actions; to make decisions in their own best interests.

Above all. A country in which those who demand tolerance are themselves tolerant.

Vapers unite!

The logo features the word "THE" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. To its right, the word "Issue" is written in a large, stylized, metallic-looking font with a blue wavy line passing through it. To the right of "Issue" is ".com.au" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.