

ASPIRE2025

Observations from SRNT Chicago, 3-6 March 2016

Authors

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Introduction

The 2016 SRNT conference was in a snowy Chicago, Illinois and was attended by the authors of this short report and also other kiwis, including Natalie Walker, Chris Bullen, Stephanie Erick and Hayden McRobbie. Natalie Walker was the Chair of the Program Organising Committee, so played a major role in shaping this conference. Chris Bullen and Hayden McRobbie were members of the Program Committee. Hayden McRobbie also won the Jarvik-Russell prize for a new investigator and delivered an excellent plenary talk outlining highlights from his career and how they have shaped his thinking on smoking cessation interventions.

The conference was characterised by the usual strong emphasis on basic and clinical science, although policy research was also well represented. As in other recent conferences, there was a huge number of presentations on e-cigarettes and other alternative nicotine delivery devices, and hence also on related topics like multiple product use.

The following is an outline of some of the highlights and key themes, which is inevitably highly selective.

Key take-home messages:

1. We need a continued focus on disparities in smoking and encouraging Māori and Pacific led and focused initiatives to achieve Smokefree 2025.
2. We need to adapt to the increasing preponderance of smoker-led, using methods that smokers have chosen. We need to find ways to engage with smokers and to shape, promote and support smoker-led quitting.
3. The debate about the role of e-cigarettes continues unabated, with many uncertainties and different approaches in policy and practice across jurisdictions.
4. Tobacco tax should continue to be emphasised as a core intervention, with ear-marking of additional revenue to ensure that smokers are fully supported to quit.
5. The imminent (hopefully) introduction of standardised packaging is an opportunity to go further and make the NZ pack a portal for quitting through state of the art use of health warnings, restrictions on new brand descriptors and implementing dissuasive sticks and pack inserts.
6. Increasing the minimum age to purchase to 21 years should be investigated as an alternative to the Tobacco Free Generation idea.
7. Mass media needs much greater priority with rigorous evaluation incorporated to provide evidence of impact and cost-effectiveness.

Key themes:

1. Pre-conference workshop on building the evidence base for reducing disparities in tobacco smoking between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples

Anaru Waa was the principal organiser of this pre-conference workshop which featured presentations from Native American/Alaskan Native, Māori, Pacific (ASPIRE partners – Dr El-Shadan Tautolo (AUT) & Stephanie Erick (ASH)) and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander perspectives. Common themes identified included: the importance of historical context and the experience of colonisation; the persisting and unacceptable disparities in the impacts of smoking on indigenous peoples; the importance of understanding cultural values and of indigenous led tobacco control and tobacco control research; the particular challenges faced by indigenous tobacco control researchers; and the need to increase capacity and carry out more research for indigenous tobacco control using the most rigorous designs (e.g. cohort studies, intervention studies). Participants were unanimous in their intentions to build on this workshop and develop opportunities to continue these conversations about indigenous tobacco e.g. future workshop or symposium at SRNT 2017, develop a report or journal article on indigenous research methods etc.

2. Pre-conference NCI workshop on Health Warnings

Jim Thrasher organised this very valuable session and presented a brief history of warning labels (WLs). Geoff Fong discussed what we know and don't know about WLs using ITC data; he summarised several studies and noted the importance of the WL size (eve 50% to 80% creates important differences). Other presentations included discussion of a large systematic review of warning label studies (Noar et al.) and several speakers discussed experiments and naturalistic studies designed to test the effects of warning labels and provide a stronger evidence base for the FDA to reintroduce this policy. Several studies had examined the court's ruling that WLs must be informational only (rather than affect arousing) and argued that emotion can be informational, and that information is more effective when it arouses emotion. The session also included novel methodological approaches, including some very high tech eye camera and fMRI studies.

3. 'Transdisciplinary Topical Discussion' session on what does the endgame for ending the tobacco epidemic look like?

This session was organised by Natalie Walker and Janet Hoek. One of the striking things was that with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Johanna Cohen and Ken Warner who were present), most of the (largely US based) audience seemed quite uninformed about endgame ideas. Perhaps endgame thinking has not permeated the wider SRNT movement. This impression was supported by my experience with a poster we presented reporting NZ policy-makers' views of radical endgame options (report coming out soon and paper in preparation), which seemed to excite much less interest than posters reporting the latest nuance in smoking cessation support or e-cigarette uptake!

4. Awards Ceremony

One of the best sessions at the conference was the opening awards ceremony. Mike Myers from the Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids in some introductory remarks argued that SRNT should be a Society for Research and Engagement, and argued that a key aspect of researchers' work was advocacy for science-based decision-making and the application of research findings. "*Tobacco Control research is not a spectator sport*" was one of his more memorable quotes.

There were numerous sessions and presentations and posters on smoking cessation. One that stood out was Professor Tim Baker's talk following receiving the Ovo Ferno award. In this talk he argued that we should be carrying out far more research into the counselling

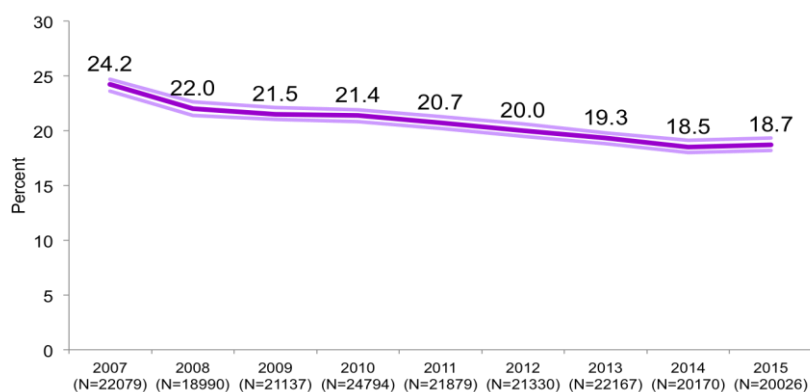
aspect of smoking cessation interventions. The focus in trials is usually to assess which pharmaceutical support regime is most effective, whilst the counselling component is under-investigated so that we don't really know what works best, for who and why. However, his most insightful observations were in discussing top down clinic/health professional led vs bottom-up smoker led quitting. He referred to evidence that quit attempts are numerous, mostly unplanned, often very short-lived and poorly recalled.¹ He argued that we have 'lost control' of smoking cessation which was increasingly smoker-led, bottom-up and viral in nature. Designing cessation apps and hoping smokers use them may be in vain, smokers will use what apps they want to whether or not smoking cessation experts think they are any good. E-cigarettes as a technology could be seen as part of this trend. He called such quit attempts 'wild-type' and argued that smoking cessation practitioners need to adapt to this new reality, and researchers need to monitor how smokers are actually smoking and quitting, and research how to encourage and support self-quitters. It also suggests that policy and population-based measures that create an environment which motivate and trigger quitting, support ongoing non-smoking in quitters and minimise cues to relapse will be increasingly important.

5. E-cigarettes and harm reduction

There was a huge number of posters and presentations addressing various aspects of e-cigarette use – patterns of use, youth uptake, impact on quitting, marketing, regulation policies, emissions and so on. Ann McNeill gave a keynote address outlining the UK approach to integrating e-cigarettes and a harm reduction strategy into a harm reduction approach. Importantly she emphasised that promotion of e-cigarettes as part of the tobacco control movement was in parallel to continuing other methods such as plain packs, mass media and tobacco taxation. She acknowledged the possible downsides of e-cigarettes for tobacco control if for example they have a gateway effect to tobacco use for youth, encouraged reduced but continued use of tobacco rather than quitting entirely, or if they increased relapse among ex-smokers due to continued use of nicotine. However, she felt the evidence for each of these was weak, and that helping smokers to quit smoking or switch from smoking to e-cigarette use was the dominant effect.

An important source of information on the population effect of e-cigarettes is the 'Smoking in England' report. There is a website where presentations of the results from the rolling Smoking Toolkit survey (see <http://www.smokinginengland.info/latest-statistics/>) can be viewed. This is well worth exploring. This survey shows there was a rapid increase in e-cigarette use in the UK from 2011-2013, and then a slower increase to the end of 2015. You can make your assessment of whether this has resulted in a marked change in the rate of decline in UK smoking prevalence from this Smoking Toolkit Graph (included in Ann's talk):

UK Smoking prevalence 2007-2015 (Smoker toolkit study)



There was an interesting session on the impacts of nicotine on the developing adolescent brain. This mostly presented evidence from animal studies which suggests that nicotine intake in adolescence may result in structural changes that result in increased susceptibility to subsequent addiction to nicotine (as well as other drugs). Of course such findings from animal models may or may not be mirrored among humans. The policy implications suggested by presenters at this session stressed the importance of protecting young people from all types of nicotine use, including e-cigarettes – e.g. through strict age restrictions on sales.

6. Other talks and themes

Tobacco tax

Frank Chaloupka gave a keynote address on taxation and tobacco control. This reiterated many of the themes in his talk during his visit to New Zealand last year. He argued that the limited evidence available suggested that tobacco tax increases have greater impact in high price jurisdictions (i.e. like NZ), and again stressed the importance of ear-marking of revenues for tobacco control, cessation support, health care etc to increase acceptability and address social justice concerns. He also suggested a tiered structure to taxation according to product harm with cigarettes taxed the most, e-cigarettes taxed less - sufficiently to deter youth use, but low enough to encourage switching from tobacco products.

Tobacco 21

There is increasing momentum in the US in particular to raise the age of legal sale for tobacco products to 21 years ² (<http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp1314626> and <http://tobacco21.org/>). 130+ jurisdictions have introduced this throughout the US, including one State – Hawaii. During the conference, California voted to become the second state to introduce this measure – a huge boost to the campaign. It is too early to say what the impact of these measures is on youth and young adult uptake, but early results presented from Needham, MA were very promising. Encouragingly public support for these initiatives is very high. ³ Interestingly, tobacco 21 laws may be an effective approach to reducing social supply among young people. One figure given during this session was that whilst 18-20yr olds in the US purchase only 2% of tobacco, they are 90% of the source of tobacco to younger kids. Data like this suggests this idea should be considered as an alternative (or possibly interim step) to the Tobacco Free Generation.

Mass media

There was a session devoted to new US mass media campaigns run by FDA, CDC and the Truth Initiative. What was particularly impressive with all of the presentations was the rigour and scope of the evaluation studies, which as a result were able to provide very robust data of the impact of the campaigns in quitting and reducing uptake. For example, the TIPs campaign included large pre-post studies as well as a randomised design comparing high and standard 'doses' which was able to demonstrate enhanced effects on awareness, quitting and other measures for the more intensive campaign. ⁴ There were some clear learnings for how evaluation of campaigns in NZ should be carried out.

Some ads from the new Truth campaign targeted at 15-21 year olds were previewed. These were based on extensive qualitative work with youth to help develop appropriate themes and messages. The campaign aims to generate anti-tobacco industry and anti-smoking sentiment and grow a social movement for change with the strap line 'Finish it' and 'We will be the generation that ends smoking' – see here for an example of the ads: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WORU0gW8q4>. The Truth campaign also makes extensive and very effective use of social media and appears to have high impact (using exposure measures) on young people. If the NZ government prefers non-regulatory

approaches, exploring whether lessons from 'Finish it' could inform an NZ social movement campaign could be valuable.

In the questions after the session, Ken Warner emphasised the huge cost-effectiveness of mass media approaches compared to mainstream medical interventions like treating hypertension.

Social Media

Sherry Emery discussed how to evaluate social media campaigns and discussions. She noted that past conceptual frameworks may not accommodate behaviours and effects of social media, which is highly integrated and delivers multiple exposures in highly varied settings. Anna Kostygina outlined an analysis of little cigar and cigarillos promotions on Twitter; this involved using keywords, identifying influencers and using topic models. The time taken to sort through tweets to identify codes and then develop machine classifications is enormous; Sherry and others welcomed contact from interested people as the start up costs are very high. Annice Kim also outlined a Twitter analysis of EC ad-sharing conducted alongside a survey to provide additional insights into exposure; in addition, she obtained permission to access and search a social media platform, enabling her to compare actual and self-reported behaviour. A presentation by Kristen Emory suggested that LGBT populations are exposed to pro-tobacco messages via social media (both advertising and user-generated messages) to a greater extent than non-LGBT populations. She discussed the implications in terms of needing to ensure any social marketing campaigns reach LGBT groups, or any other groups where inequalities in tobacco use exist.

Jessica Rath gave an excellent presentation on the Truth "Finish It" campaign and provided details of the social media strategy and evaluation. Interestingly, the campaign has moved from a focus on rebellious youth and industry manipulation to all youth and the "finishers" theme; she also described how Truth had managed radical changes in the media landscape (with near constant media cycles now possible) and the need to create opportunities for engagement (then empowerment and evangelising). She described interesting partnerships (with Vans shoes) and noted how co-branding had become an important strategy to allow brand display. Jessica's presentation raised many ideas that could be relevant in NZ, particularly if the government is more interested in non-regulatory measures.

Pack design and standardised packaging

Olivia Maynard chaired a session called 'making the pack count'. This focused on how the pack could be made a complete health communication tool. Dave Hammond began the session and presented findings on impacts of warning labels from the ITC 4- country study (which examined different policies across UK, US, Canada, Australia). He compared warning effectiveness as assessed using a top of mind recall measure, which was then followed by a prompted recall measure. He concluded that the warning label images, rather than text, drive recall. In UK, warnings with no images had the lowest recall. Portrayals of impacts on babies and of cosmetic effects (e.g. premature ageing) of smoking were very effective, while addiction and cessation messages did not tend to do so well. Dave also reported on some interesting methodological differences as the studies had included both phone and web-based questionnaires.

Ron Borland discussed the theoretical impact of packaging; noting how tobacco packaging is vital for creating 'extrinsic value' of products to users – that is value related to the brand in itself, in contrast to intrinsic value which relates to the actual utility of the product. He argued that young people put more emphasis on extrinsic value, whereas established, heavier smokers are more likely to emphasise intrinsic value. Plain packaging reduces the

ability of the tobacco industry to create extrinsic value, and that this will be particularly important in reducing uptake by young people. He also argued that reducing branding would increase the prominence and hence impact of graphic health warnings. Evidence was presented from the ITC cohort study supporting previous findings (notably from Melanie Wakefield – reported in a Tobacco Control supplement) of plain packaging’s effectiveness in Australia. This evidence broadly supported Ron’s assertions, e.g. demonstrating greater salience of health warnings, reduced strength of brand identities, reduced brand loyalty and increased dislike of packs after the introduction of plain packs.

In the same session James Thrasher discussed the possible role for pack inserts. These have only been used in Canada. Thrasher argued that while graphic warnings are useful at increasing knowledge about health risks, response efficacy (belief that quitting reduces risk of health effects) and may prompt quit attempts, inserts which provide more detailed information about how to quit and where to find support may work to increase perceived self-efficacy and hence also stimulate and support quit attempts and quit success in a complementary fashion. He presented data evaluating the impact of new and larger GHWs and new inserts introduced in Canada in 2012 which largely supported these assertions. A notable finding was that the frequency of reading the GHWs fell off over time, whilst reading of inserts increased.

Finally, Crawford Moodie discussed interventions on the cigarette stick itself. This added to recently published evidence from a [study led by Janet Hoek](#)⁵ that dissuasive sticks may be highly effective. Crawford described findings from 20 focus groups with smokers in Glasgow who were asked to discuss various cigarette sticks. Sticks which included health warnings were seen as ‘in your face’ and a constant reminder of the health damage (‘you can hide the pack, you can’t hide the cigarette’), and were highly visible to others (e.g. children) resulting in embarrassment and questioning. Participants couldn’t imagine themselves smoking such cigarettes, thought they would deter youth and make them stub cigarettes out early.

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