June 3, 2014

Docket No. FDA-2014-N-0189

I am resubmitting the following public comment, submitted to an earlier docket:

Grana, R., Ling, P.M., Barnes, R.L., Lempert, L., Glantz, S.A. (2013). Comment submitted regarding Feed and Drug Administration actions related to Nicotine Replacement Therapies and smoking-cessation products; report to Congress on innovative products and treatments for tobacco dependence; public hearing; extension of comment period. tracking # 1jx-835b-n9ph.

This comment is referenced in the following comment, which was just submitted to the current docket: FDA Should Prohibit E-cigarette Marketing that Promotes False Health Claims, tracking number 1jy-8cgs-l1sq

Stanton A. Glantz, PhD
Professor of Medicine
The FDA attempted to block the import of e-cigarettes into the U.S. as unregulated medical (drug [nicotine] delivery) devices under the Food, Drug and Cosmetics Act until such time that they were submitted to and approved by the FDA as drug delivery devices. Sottera Inc., the company that promotes NJOY e-cigarettes, sued the FDA for an injunction against the FDA's detention of their product in part on the basis that their e-cigarette products were not therapeutic drug delivery devices, but intended for and marketed as recreational products. Sottera, Inc. prevailed at both the trial court and the Court of Appeals, which rejected the FDA’s position that e-cigarettes were unapproved drug devices and agreed with Sottera, Inc. The ruling stated that the FDA could not regulate e-cigarettes as drug delivery devices and could only regulate e-cigarettes as tobacco products under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act because the products were derived from tobacco and were not being marketed with claims of therapeutic benefit. On the other hand, the Court of Appeals in Sottera Inc. v. Food & Drug Administration ruled that the FDA has express authority to regulate e-cigarettes when e-cigarette products are “therapeutically marketed,” like nicotine gums and transdermal patches, since then they would fall under the jurisdiction of the drug/device provisions of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FDCA).

Given the position the e-cigarette company took in the litigation against the FDA, we were surprised to find that Sottera, Inc., which promotes the e-cigarette brand NJOY, as well as VMR Products LLC, which promotes the e-cigarette brand V2Cigs, as well as the e-cigarette industry’s trade association, Smokefree Alternatives Trade Association (SFATA) have been directing their consumers to provide public comment to this docket regarding a “Report to Congress on Innovative Products and Treatments for Tobacco Dependence” in their direct e-mail (Figure 1) and on their websites (Figure 2). This action indicates that these companies are concerned about how the FDA could characterize the use of these products in its report to Congress on “products and treatments for tobacco dependence.”

In addition to urging their customers to comment on this docket regarding products and treatments for nicotine dependence, e-cigarette companies have explicitly and implicitly made therapeutic claims about their products in their online marketing and promotional materials. E-cigarette websites provide information and feature testimonials from customers about how e-cigarettes help smokers curb and eventually quit smoking (Figures 3 and 4). Specifically, sites contain language such as "E cigarette helps you to slowly decrease your nicotine addiction without the stress of giving up the behavioural pleasures of smoking" (Figure 3).

The e-cigarette companies’ websites also contain sections of sites that explain how an e-cigarette could be used to quit smoking, as seen on www.usaecigarette.com and www.apollo.com (Figure 3). The testimonials on the websites often imply that their e-cigarette products will help their customers quit smoking (Figure 4). For example, on www.vapornine.com (January 14, 2013):

---

1 Note 1, supra
3 627 F. 3d 891 (U.S. App. DC 2010)
4 21 U.S.C. section 351 et seq.
"I just wanted to let you know that you have changed my life! I LOVE my vapornine supplies and I was able to completely quit the same week I started vaping. I am now sickened by the smell of cigarettes, which never happened before, not even during any of the other brief periods of time during which I was able to temporarily quit..."

Likewise, a testimonial posted on www.smokestik.com (January 14, 2013) explicitly compared e-cigarettes to FDA regulated therapeutic products used for smoking cessation treatments:

"Just wanted to let you know how much I love your product. I have smoked for over 30 years and thanks to Smoke Stik I have quit. I know that this product was not meant to be a quitting type of product but it worked for me. I tried the patches, gum, mints and Chantix…..none of them worked. I now use the non nicotine flavor and just the thoughts of having it in my hand and the "smoke" coming out, I quit thanks to your product." (Figure 4)

Publishing these testimonials on websites controlled by e-cigarette companies represents promotion of e-cigarettes as therapeutic devices, despite the fact that many of the websites also contain disclaimers in tiny print stating that the products are not intended for smoking cessation (example in Figure 5).

Whether the tobacco product is marketed for therapeutic use is gleaned from the universe of the product’s marketing. For FDA regulatory purposes, the "intended use" of a product is determined by "the objective intent of the persons legally responsible" for labeling the product. 21 C.F.R. § 201.128. Objective intent may be shown, for example, "by labeling claims, advertising matter, or oral or written statements" by the labeler. Id. It may also be shown "by the circumstances that the article is, with the knowledge of such persons or their representatives, offered and used for a purpose for which it is neither labeled nor advertised." Id. By posting customer comments and testimonials on websites controlled by the e-cigarette marketers, they clearly have knowledge that their products are “used” by those customers as either a smoking cessation therapeutic device. Furthermore, the fact that these companies and their trade association, SFATA, have been encouraging their consumers to submit public comments to a docket about smoking cessation products can be read no other way than they are promoting their products as having therapeutic benefit.

At least one site, https://rivosig.com, explicitly acknowledges that the company, RivoSig, should not be making smoking cessation claims on their site (Figure 6). In a blog post RivoSig states: "Now legally we can't say that RivoSig e-cigarettes are a smoking cessation product, nor can we tell you they are better for you (those legal pencil-pushers at the FDA would get there panties ruffled if we did). However, what we can offer is unbiased knowledge and research that comes from reputable sources"(Figure 6). It is unclear to the reader to which reputable sources they refer, as no evidence of the knowledge or research is actually offered with this statement (Figure 6).

In the Sottera decision, Judge Williams wrote: "Still, the district court noted that the factual record on NJOY is meager and that the FDA may establish that NJOY does in fact make therapeutic claims regarding its electronic cigarettes. Mem. Op. at 25 n.17. Until such time, the definitional line laid down in Brown & Williamson (as we understand it) leaves the FDA without jurisdiction over these products under the FDCA's drug/device provisions." The Sottera decision holds that the FDA could and should regulate e-cigarettes as drugs/devices under the FDCA if they are found to be “therapeutically marketed.”

The e-cigarette companies cannot have it both ways. They cannot claim they are regular tobacco products that, as “customarily marketed,” may only be regulated as a tobacco product under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, thus avoiding regulation as medical devices and the burden of proving safety and therapeutic benefit, and then create the impression through their marketing and direct consumer communication they have submitted therapeutic claims to the FDA and won approval for them.

The FDA should take the following actions as a result of the information presented in this comment:

---

5 Pub. L. 111-31, June 22, 2009
1. Make note of the therapeutic and health claims made and promoted by e-cigarette companies in its Report to Congress on Innovative Products and Treatments for Tobacco Dependence, comment on the lack of evidence to support such claims, and inform Congress that the FDA is taking actions now to stop such claims from being made until such time as the companies submit scientific evidence to substantiate these therapeutic claims.6

2. Immediately order the companies to stop making claims (direct and implied) that e-cigarettes are effective cessation devices, including ordering the companies to remove and not post further testimonials to this effect.

3. Work with the Federal Trade Commission to prohibit such claims as false advertising until such time that they have been scientifically substantiated and approved by the FDA.

6 As a separate issue from the promotion of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation therapy, the e-cigarette companies also promote their products as healthier alternatives to conventional cigarettes. In the District Court decision in the Soterra case, Judge Leon stated: “To the extent those products are marketed as providing the same experience as traditional cigarettes but without the negative health consequences associated with tar and smoke, they fall within the plain meaning of ‘modified risk tobacco product,’ which the Tobacco Act defines as any tobacco product ‘sold or distributed for use to reduce harm or the risk of tobacco-related disease associated with commercially marketed tobacco products’” (680 F. Supp. 2d 62 at 75 (D.D.C. 2010), aff’d, 627 F. 3d 891 (U.S. App. DC 2010)). E-cigarettes have not been approved as modified risk tobacco products as required by section 911 of the Tobacco Control Act and cannot lawfully be promoted as such. The FDA could take immediate action to halt this unlawful promotion activity.
Figure 1. Emails to consumers from e-cigarette companies encouraging submission to docket FDA-2012-N-1148-0011 on a report to Congress about smoking cessation therapies from NJOY, January 11, 2013 (top) and V2Cigs, January 14, 2013 (bottom). The links in these emails were:


FOR V2: http://www.regulations.gov/?utm_source=V2Cigs.com+Newsletter&utm_campaign=4a5a75101e-V2_Cigs_FDA1_14_2013&utm_medium=email#!documentDetail;D=FDA-2012-N-1148-0011
Figure 2. Homepage of V2Cigs and the Smoke Free Alternatives Trade Association encouraging submissions to docket FDA-2012-N-1148-0011 on a report to Congress about smoking cessation therapies. The links in these pages were:
Welcome to Altimoff

E Cigarettes by USAE Cigarette is an innovative new smoking alternative. We offer e cigarette starter kit, e cigar and e smoking accessories in USA. Altimoff E Cigarette brand name stands for quality and innovation. Electronic Cigarette is a new smoking alternative that LOOKS, FEELS and SMOKES like a real cigarette. It is battery operated device with replaceable cartridges - that does not need to be lit. When Electronic Cigarette is in use the indicator light starts glowing in red and virtually smokeless vapour is emitted which looks like real smoke. E Cigarette helps you to slowly decrease your nicotine addiction without the stress of giving up behavioural pleasures of smoking.

Faq

How can Altimoff E Cigarette help you quit smoking?

With all other alternative smoking products that are available on the market you receive your dose of nicotine but they do not relieve your cravings for the actual process of smoking. After years of smoking the continuous use of cigarettes in different places it becomes a habit. If you smoked for 20 years while driving – imagine every day multiple times a day for 20 years – then driving without smoking is extremely difficult - it's a habit, a way of life. You are not only addicted to nicotine and other added chemicals you are addicted to the actual process of smoking. With Altimoff E Cigarette quitting smoking is easier and less stressful than with any other product available on the market today.

What is the best method to quit smoking with Altimoff E Cigarette?

Best method is the one that works for you. Each person is different and the same method does not apply to all. You can try one of the 3 possible e cigarette methods outlined below.

1. Four step method - with specific time period guidelines for each nicotine content level e cigarette cartridge. Full description is available in the User's Manual that comes with each e cigarette starter kit.

2. General method – no specific guidelines - quit smoking with e cigarette at your own pace.

3. Slow substitute method – first start by substituting ordinary cigarettes with Altimoff E Cigarette. Cut down on smoking traditional cigarettes. Decide which nicotine level is best for you. Then as you see that you do not use a cigarette as much as you did before then start with lower nicotine content e cigarette cartridges. Then when you are ready move on to NO nicotine e cigarette cartridges.

Is there a possibility of a relapse?
Figure 3. Presence of therapeutic claims on e-cigarette websites. Information about using an e-cigarette to "slowly decrease your nicotine addiction without the stress of giving up the behavioural pleasures of smoking" on the homepage of www.usaecigarette.com (top) and information about how Altimoff e-cigarettes can be used to quit smoking in the FAQ section of www.usaecigarette.com (middle), January 15, 2013. Information on Apollo Ecigs website: "How do people use e-cigarettes to quit smoking" http://www.apolloecigs.com/What-is-an-Electronic-cigarette-s/67.htm (bottom), January 15, 2013
Just wanted to let you know how much I love your product. I have smoked for over 30 years and thanks to Smoke Stik I have quit. I know that this product was not meant to be a quitting type of product but it worked for me. I tried the patches, gum, mints and Chantix...none of them worked. I now use the non nicotine flavor and just the thoughts of having it in my hand and the "smoke" coming out, I quit thanks to your product.

Deborah

Testimonial about quitting with the e-cigarette in contrast to approved smoking cessation therapies on www.smokestik.com

Katie - Alexandria, VA

“I just wanted to let you know that you have changed my life! I LOVE my vapornine supplies and I was able to completely quit smoking the same day I started vaping. I am now sickened by the smell of cigarettes, which never happened before, not even during any of the other brief periods of time during which I was able to temporarily quit... I used all my business cards (as several friends have ordered too) When you print more, I will be happy to hand some out I will ask for them in my next order.”

Testimonial about quitting smoking with the e-cigarette on www.vapornine.com

Figure 4. Testimonials on e-cigarette websites regarding using the e-cigarette to quit smoking, www.smokestik.com (top) and www.vapornine.com (bottom) January 14, 2013
Figure 5. Disclaimer on the bottom of the www.v2cigs.com homepage. The last line read: "V2Cigs products are not marketed for use as a smoking cessation product. Just like traditional tobacco cigarettes, V2 Electronic Cigarettes are not approved by the American FDA."
Figure 6. Full text of the blog entry on the RivoSig site with accompanying image on January 14, 2013: https://rivosig.com/blog/#.UPCFhdXCnWB. Where it says "Click here to read the PDF" is a link to https://rivosig.com/media/wysiwyg/rivosig-electronic-cigarettes-shape-magazine.pdf