

**From:** Gerry Stimson [mailto:gerry.stimson@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** 11 January 2016 20:49  
**To:** IPSO Inquiries <inquiries@ipso.co.uk>  
**Subject:** How The Media Deals With E-Cigarettes - And A Complaint About A Telegraph Article

From:

**Prof Gerry Stimson**  
**18 Gloucester Road**  
**Richmond**  
**Surrey**  
**TW9 3BU**

[gerry.stimson@gmail.com](mailto:gerry.stimson@gmail.com)

**07872 600 908**

Sir Alan Moses

Chairman

IPSO

[inquiries@ipso.co.uk](mailto:inquiries@ipso.co.uk)

Dear Sir Alan,

We are senior academics who are very troubled by the way careless press coverage is seriously undermining the public health priority of reducing smoking. We raise one specific complaint but would also ask you to consider discussing with editors their public interest duty to take particular care in the reporting of e-cigarettes.

Bodies ranging from Action on Smoking and Health to Public Health England have expressed concerns over how public perceptions of the relative harm of vaping e-cigarettes compared with smoking tobacco cigarettes are at huge variance to the established science. The media is chiefly responsible for this inaccurate perception. Given that around 2.6 million people currently vape and 9 million smokers don't this is a matter of great importance.

Our specific complaint concerns an article published by the Telegraph on 29 December 2015. Its headline was "E-cigarettes are no safer than smoking tobacco, scientists warn" and its opening sentence "Vaping is no safer than smoking". A highlighted quote states "they are no better than smoking regular cigarettes". The article carries even more weight in the mind of non-scientists because it is written by the Telegraph's Science Editor.

The article breaches section 1 of the IPSO code ('Accuracy') in that the article contained inaccurate, misleading and distorted information. The Science Editor did not take care to check whether the claims in the scientific study and the accompanying press release could be supported by the evidence.

The scientific study on which the article is based in no way justifies the claimed comparison that e-cigarettes are no safer than smoking tobacco. A cell study of the type reported cannot establish that there is a real risk of cancer and it cannot establish whether it is the same magnitude as smoking, and cannot assess risks other than cancer.

The study report states that it found damage to cells which had been exposed to e-cigarette vapor for up to eight weeks. The study also makes clear that it was unable to do a comparison with the impact on those cells exposed to cigarette smoke because they all died within 24 hours due to its exceptionally higher toxicity than e-cigarettes. This finding of higher toxicity of cigarette smoke should have alerted the Science Editor because it is inconsistent with the study author's claim – repeated in the Telegraph article – of equivalent risk. We wonder whether the Science Editor read the research study or only relied on the press release.

Even if this study had, as the headline and text suggests, been a comparison of relative risks of smoking and vaping the conclusions should be set in the context of the wider range of scientific findings on e-cigarettes in the evidence review by Public Health England in August 2015 which found that e-cigarettes are 95% less risky than smoking. This PHE report was endorsed by bodies including Action on Smoking and Health, Association of Directors of Public Health, British Lung Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Faculty of Public Health, Royal College of Physicians, Royal Society for Public Health and UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies.

We notice the author of the Telegraph report, Sarah Knapton, wrote another inaccurate report about e-cigarettes which IPSO ruled against last year.

As well as rebuking rogue reporters we ask you to write to the newspaper editors you deal with alerting them about the risks of taking so-called scientific press releases on e-cigarettes at face value especially those coming from the United States. There is a very hostile approach to vaping dominating many funding streams in the US and that shows up in the press releases.

In the UK we note that the scientific, public health and political communities have all shifted views to seeing the value of e-cigarettes as an important substitute to smoking.

Last month the Prime Minister became the first world leader to endorse e-cigarettes. We would hope that some newspapers will follow suit.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Gerry Stimson

Emeritus Professor of Social Science and Medicine

Imperial College London

On behalf of:

Prof Linda Bauld

Professor of Health Policy

Institute for Social Marketing

University of Stirling, and

Deputy Director of the UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies

Dr Lynne E. Dawkins

Reader in Psychology

University of East London

Prof Jean-Francois Etter

Professor of Public Health

Faculty of Medicine

University of Geneva

Prof Peter Hajek

Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine Barts and

The London School of Medicine and Dentistry

Queen Mary University of London

Prof David Nutt

Edmond J. Safra Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology

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The London School of Medicine and Dentistry  
Queen Mary University of London

Prof David Nutt  
Edmond J. Safra Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology  
Director, Neuropsychopharmacology Unit  
Imperial College London

Prof Riccardo Polosa  
Professor of Internal Medicine  
University of Catania