You have been QUALIFIED for a smokeless e-cig starter kit

Kate Hunt,1 Helen Sweeting2

Shortly after the shock of seeing e-cigarette advertising on television, an unsolicited e-mail arrived promoting an ‘e-cig starter kit’ (figure 1). This showed ‘Megan’ (attractive, slim, elegant, professional, confident and happy) ‘smoking’ an e-cigarette, apparently on a plane. Incongruously, the e-cigarette billows smoke. The sender’s address and titles of embedded links suggest the ease of trying e-cigarettes, and that e-cigarettes are healthy and inoffensive. Ingeniously, the advert can be read as showing that holding a cigarette object is attractive and socially desirable, and that e-cigarettes are (somewhat) distinct from ‘ordinary’ cigarettes.

Emerging research raises concerns over whether e-cigarettes renormalise and reglamourise smoking and/or act as a gateway to smoking.1 2 Within present legislation, ‘Megan’ can ‘smoke’ her e-cigarette in public spaces because e-cigarettes are not subject to smoke-free regulation. They can also be advertised, although some may question whether a smoking e-cigarette complies with guidelines.

In 2013, US Democratic Congress members wrote to e-cigarette manufacturers regarding marketing tactics likely to ‘hook’ young people,3 and posted a presentation highlighting parallels with earlier cigarette marketing.4 As gender and health researchers, we also note the strong resemblance to images of women in advertising which so successfully drew earlier generations of women to smoking.5 6

Contributors Both authors have contributed equally to writing this short piece.

Funding This study was supported by the MRC.

Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

Open Access This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 3.0) license, which permits others to distribute, remix, adapt and build upon this work, for commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited. See: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/

REFERENCES
6 Elliot R. Women and smoking since 1890. Abingdon: Routledge, 2008.