



Plataforma para la
reducción del daño
por tabaquismo

THR SUMMIT SPAIN 2023 EPPUR SI MUOVE

International experts reject vetoes and censorship and call for an open debate based on science to combat smoking in Spain

- **The national and international experts attending this meeting defend all the science that exists around harm reduction and recall how countries such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand incorporate this tool in their smoking plans.**
- **“The Spanish Government must regulate in a sensible manner and listen to the views of the whole scientific community, and must not be afraid of investigating all products which have the potential to reduce harm”, stated Dr Fagerstrom, creator of the Fagerstrom test, which is used in tobacco cessation clinics**

In Madrid, on 23 February 2023. “Spain needs more than ever to open a debate on how to advance in the fight against smoking and not stigmatise or veto, as we have done lately, those who think differently”, said Dr Fernando Fernández Bueno, spokesperson for the Platform for Smoking Harm Reduction and oncology surgeon at the Gómez Ulla Hospital, at the opening of the **“THR SUMMIT SPAIN 2023 EPPUR SI MUOVE”**. The online meeting brought together **national and international experts** to discuss what smoking harm reduction is and how useful it is in the fight against smoking, and was followed by **more than 700 people** who connected both from Spain and from more than 15 countries.

Dr Bueno thanked all the experts for their participation in the event and their commitment to the fight against smoking, and explained what had happened over the last few days and the reason for this meeting. The initial idea was to hold a face-to-face Conference at the Rey Juan Carlos University with the collaboration of different organisations. However, pressures from the General Directorate of Public Health of the Ministry of Health and from antivaping lobbies led them to withdraw their support. “Even so, we wanted to organise this event so that people can debate and learn how to advance in the fight against smoking as other countries have done, based on scientific evidence,” explained the Platform spokesperson. “It is precisely our commitment to science and freedom of opinion that has led us to call this meeting **“Eppur si muove”** (and yet it moves),” recalling the words said by Galileo Galilei during his trial for his theory that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

During the conference, **the latest scientific advances and international experiences** in harm reduction were analysed, as well as new studies that support their effectiveness as a complementary tool to prevention and cessation in the fight against smoking.

Among them, for example, the latest review by the UK Department of Health and Social Care¹, already the eighth, which maintains that, in the short and medium term, vaping represents **a small fraction of the risks of smoking** and that there is significantly less exposure to harmful substances from vaping compared to smoking, in biomarkers of cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nicotine-vaping-in-england-2022-evidence-update>



On the other hand, **Cochrane Reviews**², the gold standard in evidence-based medicine, concludes that **there is high certainty evidence that nicotine-containing e-cigarettes aid smoking cessation**, evidence that is reflected in the significant drop in smoking rates that the UK has seen in recent years.

In addition, at the international level, **New Zealand**³ has passed - and will soon enforce- a ban on tobacco purchases for those born after 2008 while, in order to get many people to quit smoking, **the harm reduction strategy** of promoting e-cigarettes to adult smokers continues, with also very noticeable declines in smoking rates since then.

Three panels of experts

The event consisted of **two international panels and one national panel**. The first one, entitled "**Scientific evidence on tobacco harm reduction, what do we know so far?**" was attended by Dr **Karl Fagerstrom**, founder of the Society for Research on Nicotine and Tobacco (SRNT) and creator of the Fagerstrom Test used daily in smoking cessation clinics around the world; **Clive Bates**, former Director of Action on Smoking and Health UK and former advisor to British Prime Minister Tony Blair; **Professor Brad Rodu**, Chairman of the Department of Tobacco Harm Reduction Research at the Brown Cancer Center at the University of Louisville, Kentucky; and Dr **Konstantinos Farsalinos**, researcher at the Onassis Center for Cardiac Surgery in Athens-Greece and at the National School of Public Health in Greece, currently the author with the most peer-reviewed publications on e-cigarettes worldwide. During the panel they presented the latest scientific evidence on harm reduction products that continue to argue -with more evidence than ever- that these products are much less harmful than smoking, that they help cessation and that there is no gateway to smoking in young people.

Regarding what could be done in Spain, Dr Karl Fagerstrom stated that "the Spanish Government must regulate in a sensible manner and listen to the views of the whole scientific community, and must not be afraid of investigating all products which have the potential to reduce harm".

The second panel, also international, addressed the regulatory challenges of harm reduction under the title "**The war on nicotine: regulation, international experience and consequences for public health**" and was moderated by **David Sweanor**, Chairman of the Advisory Committee, Centre for Health Law, Policy and Ethics at the University of Ottawa, who has been legal advisor in the area of Tobacco Control to the World Health Organization, the World Bank, the Pan American Health Organization, the International Union Against Cancer and numerous governments.

The panel discussed the parallels between the war on drugs and the war on tobacco from a harm reduction approach, as well as regulatory developments in different countries. The international experts also **criticised the censorship** of the Spanish health authorities, considering it extraordinarily serious that in the 21st century a government should prevent debate and discussion on science in a public university. "There is no space to think or question, there is no interest in dialogue, only the need to attack, with science, reason, humanism and ethics being collateral damage," stressed David Sweanor.

Finally, the national panel was held under the title "**An urgent strategy for a smoke-free generation. Consequences of the denialism of THR science by the Spanish authorities**". It was attended by **Josep Maria Ramon-Torrell**, Head of the Tobacco Prevention Service at Bellvitge University Hospital, Miguel de la Guardia, Professor of Analytical Chemistry at the University of Valencia and **Jose María García Basterrechea**, former head of the addiction

² <https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD010216.pub7/full/es>

³ [Facts & figures | Health Promotion Agency Smokefree](#)



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treatment service at the General University Hospital of Murcia. During the panel, the Spanish experts analysed the latest smoking data presented in the EDADES 2022 survey which show, without a doubt, that smoking rates continue to increase after 20 years and two anti-smoking laws, and raised the need for new approaches, both in healthcare and at the policy level, which consider new tools to offer more effective and realistic solutions to the adult smoker in Spain, where there are about 10 million smokers.

Dr Fernández Bueno closed the meeting. During his speech, he highlighted the **commitment** of all the members of the Platform and of the doctors and scientists who took part in the conference **in the fight against smoking**. "All those who have taken part in this conference and those of us who are part of the Platform are here to help and, because of this, we place ourselves at the disposal of the authorities in the fight against smoking," Dr Bueno concluded.

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