

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** Smokeless tobacco availability and promotion in Edmonton: Exploring the barriers to and the opportunities for tobacco harm reduction

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 6 February 2009

**Reviewer:** Joseph DiFranza

### **Reviewer's report:**

This is a research report describing a small inventory of the display of smokeless tobacco products in stores in Canada. The purpose of the study appears to be to give the authors a platform to express their opposition to restrictions on the marketing and display of smokeless tobacco products. It is clear that the authors have an agenda in this regard since the manuscript contains many statements of opinion such as that it is unfortunate that marketing is restricted. An oft repeated premise is that public health would be improved if smokers switched to the product made by the manufacturer that provided funding for the study. Also, the authors contend that the motivation of the manufacturer is to improve public health and not to make a profit.

The study design is not relevant to the main points that are made in the discussion of the paper. The study design is not at all clear to me. It is not clear how the second sample was selected. How did the authors know which stores had been selected for the roll out of the product? It appears that the authors were hired by the company to evaluate how their products were displayed and then used this information as the basis of the paper but it is not clear how the data address any hypothesis. As the authors point out, displays have now been banned and the data are really of no scientific value. One does not need to do a survey to demonstrate that banning the display of smokeless tobacco products will make them less visible to consumers.

The author's main premise, that smokers will switch to smokeless tobacco products could be more appropriately tested by selecting 100 smokers, giving them information about the "health benefits" of ST, giving them a sample, and then seeing how many will make the switch. If this works, then public health workers could get out the message. I don't know of any smokers who have switched to ST, so I am skeptical about whether such an effort will be successful.

**Level of interest:** An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare I have no conflicting interests.