

WHO urges gov't to regulate sale of e-cigarettes

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The World Health Organization on Tuesday, July 2, 2013, urged the government to regulate the sale of e-cigarettes, citing a trend in other countries where people who started using it ended up smoking the real thing. Electronic cigarettes are battery powered devices that vaporizes a nicotine laced liquid solution into an aerosol mist which simulates the act of tobacco smoking. SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES/AFP

MANILA, Philippines—Beware of e-cigarettes.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday urged the government to regulate the sale of e-cigarettes, citing a trend in other countries where people who started using it ended up smoking the real thing.

Dr. Susan Mercado, director for Building Healthy Communities and Populations of the WHO-Western Pacific office, said there was no proof that the use of electronic cigarettes was safe and that it could help people kick the habit of smoking.

“In 2010, the WHO organized a global panel of experts to review the evidence and there is no evidence to show that it can help you quit smoking,” Mercado said at a press conference following the Red Orchid Awards ceremonies at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City.

The Red Orchid Awards is a recognition given by the Department of Health (DOH) to government offices, state hospitals and local government units that have been consistent in promoting a “100-percent tobacco-free” environment. At the event, the WHO also awarded a medal of honor to President Aquino, Sen. Franklin Drilon, Davao City Rep. Isidro Ungab and the champions of the “sin tax” law for winning the “World No Tobacco Day Awards” given two months ago.

Every year, the WHO names people and institutions that have made outstanding contributions to advance the policies and measures contained in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its guidelines.

The Philippines was among the five recipients of the award in the Western Pacific region.

However, while the government has succeeded in passing the new law, which increased the excise tax rates on tobacco products and alcoholic beverages as one way to curb the prevalence of smoking in the country, among other reasons, it has yet to tackle e-cigarettes.

Battery-operated stick

Some smokers trying to kick the habit have turned to the battery-operated stick as a safe alternative.

But Mercado on Tuesday pointed out that the WHO had observed a trend in other countries in which those who started using e-cigarettes ended up smoking regular cigarettes.

“So we are calling on countries to regulate and to use other regulatory means whether [in the form of] taxation, product registration... whatever means that a government can do to regulate it because we do not know if it is safe. We do not know that it can help you quit smoking,” she said.

Mercado also pointed out that neighboring countries like Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia were already regulating the sale and use of e-cigarettes. The United Kingdom announced last week that it would start regulating e-cigarettes and other products containing nicotine as medicines.

“Other countries are starting to do it on their own using their own laws,” said Mercado.

FDA warning

Last week, the Food and Drug Administration came out with a public warning against using e-cigarettes, saying these were not emission-free.

The FDA said e-cigarettes contained “volatile organic substances” harmful to one’s health, like propylene glycol and “carcinogenic” metals like nickel and chromium.

Mercado also expressed concern about the lack of full disclosure of the contents of e-cigarettes currently sold by manufacturers.

“Many of these manufacturers do not disclose what is the content... but we do know that it contains pure nicotine and it can actually create nicotine addiction,” she said.

LGU awardees

The DOH elevated two cities, 10 municipalities, three government offices and nine hospitals to the Red Orchid Awards Hall of Fame for effectively implementing “100-percent tobacco-free” environments for three consecutive years.

The Hall of Fame winners for the local government units were Balanga City; Roxas City; Dupax del Norte, Dupax del Sur and Solano in Nueva Vizcaya; Calatrava, Romblon; Buenavista, Guimaras; Amlan, Negros Oriental; Naval, Biliran; Alamada, North Cotabato; Tantaran, South Cotabato; and Veruela, Agusan del Sur.

They received a trophy and P500,000 cash grant to help sustain their tobacco control efforts.

State hospitals

The three Hall of Fame winners for government offices were the Provincial Health Office of Nueva Vizcaya and the DOH regional offices in the Bicol region and Western Visayas.

The nine hospitals elevated to the Hall of Fame were Quirino Memorial Medical Center; Luis Hora Memorial Regional Hospital; Mariano Marcos Memorial Hospital and Medical Center; Nueva Vizcaya Provincial Hospital; Tagaytay Treatment and Rehabilitation Center; Ospital ng Palawan; Corazon Locsin Montelibano Memorial Regional Hospital; Western Visayas Sanitarium; and Cotabato Regional and Medical Center.

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