

News Release



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Penn Study Shows Smokers Assume a False Sense of Safety from Advertising for Low Nicotine Quest® Cigarettes

(Philadelphia, PA) - A study by researchers at the Transdisciplinary Tobacco Use Research Center of the **University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine** found that many smokers make false inferences about the safety of new low nicotine Quest® cigarettes. This research appears in the March issue of *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*.

“This study is the first to evaluate how regular smokers responded to a print ad for Quest cigarettes, a newly developed cigarette marketed as a way to gradually reduce nicotine exposure via smoking cigarettes that are lower in nicotine,” said author **Caryn Lerman, PhD**, Associate Director for Cancer Control and Population Science at the **Abramson Cancer Center of the University of Pennsylvania**, and Professor in Penn’s School of Medicine and the Annenberg Public Policy Center.

Quest® cigarettes are a brand of low-nicotine cigarettes manufactured by Vector Tobacco, Inc., and currently marketed in eight US states. Quest® cigarettes, both regular and menthol, are manufactured with three progressively lower nicotine levels and marketed as allowing smokers to “step-down” nicotine levels to enjoy “nicotine-free smoking.” Anti-smoking advocates highlight the long-term health effects – like cancer and emphysema – that result from a lifetime of smoking or chewing tobacco. These maladies, however, *are the result of chemicals in cigarettes other than nicotine*. While Quest® cigarettes do offer reduced *nicotine levels*, they *do not* have progressively *less tar* and thus, still pose significant health risks. Given evidence that many smokers misinterpret the information contained in marketing campaigns for such “light” cigarettes it is important to understand how smokers perceive this newly marketed low nicotine cigarette.

Lerman led a research team that examined the response of 200 regular smokers to a Quest ® cigarette print advertisement using a mall intercept survey approach. Participants viewed a single Quest® cigarette print advertisement and then were asked to answer a series of questions about their smoking and quitting history, beliefs about Quest® cigarettes, perceived vulnerability to the health effects of smoking, and the “need for cognition” – or how much people like to think critically about information. Researchers found that as many as 45% of smokers made false inferences about the tar content of Quest® cigarettes. Also, smokers who felt less vulnerable to the health effects of smoking and who do not enjoy thinking critically about issues made more false inferences about the potential harms of Quest® cigarettes.

“These results reinforce the need for public health awareness campaigns to relay the message that smoking any cigarettes – regardless of nicotine content – can have deleterious health effects,” said co-author **Andrew Strasser, PhD**.

This research was funded by the National Cancer Institute and was conducted by the University of Pennsylvania Transdisciplinary Tobacco Use Research Center and the Center of Excellence in Cancer Communication Research.

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PENN Medicine is a \$2.9 billion enterprise dedicated to the related missions of medical education, biomedical research, and high-quality patient care. PENN Medicine consists of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (founded in 1765 as the nation's first medical school) and the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

Penn's School of Medicine is ranked #2 in the nation for receipt of NIH research funds; and ranked #4 in the nation in U.S. News & World Report's most recent ranking of top research-oriented medical schools. Supporting 1,400 fulltime faculty and 700 students, the School of Medicine is recognized worldwide for its superior education and training of the next generation of physician-scientists and leaders of academic medicine.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System includes three hospitals [Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, which is consistently ranked one of the nation's few "Honor Roll" hospitals by U.S. News & World Report; Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation's first hospital; and Penn Presbyterian Medical Center]; a faculty practice plan; a primary-care provider network; two multispecialty satellite facilities; and home care and hospice.

This release is available online at http://www.uphs.upenn.edu/news/News_Releases/mar06/questcig.htm