

## Dr Colin Mendelsohn

MB BS Syd (Hons)

TOBACCO TREATMENT

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30 August 2022

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital  
Director of Medical Services

cc. Chief Executive officer

Good morning,

I am writing about an invitation for me to speak at an RPA/Concord Department of Renal Medicine meeting on vaping nicotine for smoking cessation. The invitation was later withdrawn after a baseless and defamatory complaint from a clinician.

I was formally invited in writing on 15 February 2022 by Dr Tracey Ying, a Nephrologist & Transplant physician at the Department Renal Medicine at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

The final agreed date was 4 August 2022 at 3pm. I was provided with a Zoom link.

I was later informed that a respiratory physician at Concord Hospital had complained that I had been invited to speak. Dr Shaundee Sen, Head of Nephrology at Concord Hospital sent the following email. I am not aware of to whom it was sent.

“One of our resp physicians here saw that A/Prof Colin Mendelssehn was presenting, and felt that that was a conflict of interest. Prof Matthew Peters pointed out to a colleague that CM represents/is funded by a tobacco company, and therefore shouldn't be presenting in this forum. I've had a look and CM has noted on his website that he is presenting at RPAH. Not sure who knows him or if a pre-existing relationship with RPAH??”

On 30 June 2022 I received an email from Professor Steve Chadban, Director of Renal Medicine at RPAH cancelling the invitation. The reason given was that this topic is ‘a controversial one’ and that ‘uptake by teenagers is causing more pressing concerns.’

This explanation was bizarre as vaping nicotine is an approved quitting aid under the [RACGP Smoking Cessation guidelines](#) and is legal under TGA guidelines when a prescription for nicotine liquid is provided. The issue of teenage vaping is irrelevant to quitting by adult smokers who have a prescription.

I have two concerns:

### **1. I have been defamed**

I do not “represents/is funded by a tobacco company” and never have. I have never received funding from a tobacco or e-cigarette company. All my advocacy for vaping is at my own expense and is motivated by wanting to improve public health.

My credentials are

I was a Sydney GP for 27 years with a special interest in smoking cessation and now work exclusively in tobacco treatment, helping smokers to quit.

I am a member of the Expert Advisory Group that develops the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners national smoking cessation guidelines.

I was a Conjoint Associate Professor in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales. For many years I was actively involved with Professor Robyn Richmond in researching, developing, and teaching *Smokescreen for the 1990s*, a program developed at the University of New South Wales for use by general practitioners to help smokers quit.

I am the Founding Chairman of the [Australian Tobacco Harm Reduction Association](#), a health promotion charity established to raise awareness of tobacco harm reduction options.

I am a past Vice President of the Australian Association of Smoking Cessation Professionals, Australia's peak body for experts in the field of smoking cessation.

I have written a book on vaping, *Stop Smoking Start Vaping*, published by an independent publisher with no external funding.

I have taught (see [here](#)) and written extensively in my peer-reviewed publications on smoking cessation and vaping (publications [here](#)).

More about me is available on my website [here](#).

## 2. Scientific debate

As scientists we should be able to have polite, respectful academic debates on important controversial subjects.

Professor Peters has a different view on vaping and appears to be trying censor debate. My views are in line with many overseas experts and organisations, including the RACGP, UK Royal College of Physicians, Public Health England, NASEM, the New Zealand Ministry of Health and UK National Institute for Health Care Excellence.

In Australia, vaping nicotine is an approved, legitimate second-line quitting aid for smokers who are otherwise unable to quit and it could be lifesaving for smokers with renal disease who are unable to quit smoking.

I wrote to Professor Chadban about my concerns on two occasions, 5 August and 11 August 2022.

**However, I have so far received no reply.**

Below is the email string on this matter (start from the bottom).

To resolve this matter, I would like two things

1. An apology in writing from Professor Peters and a clear statement that his defamatory claim about me is untrue to all the recipients of the email and others who have had access to it. Otherwise, I will be forced to consider legal action for defamation.
2. Reinstatement of the invitation to speak to the Renal Department. As I wrote to Professor Chadban, I am happy to debate the issues with Professor Peters. Alternatively, he could be invited to present his views at another meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you as soon as possible to resolve this unpleasant matter.

Sincerely,

Colin Mendelsohn.

Dr Colin Mendelsohn

Email correspondence on next page

## EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

**From:** mendel@bigpond.net.au <mendel@bigpond.net.au>  
**Sent:** Thursday, 11 August 2022 6:20 PM  
**To:** 'Steve Chadban (Sydney LHD)' <Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au>  
**Subject:** RE: Vaping talk August 4

Hi Steve,

I just wanted to confirm you received my email from last week?

When can I expect a response?

Best wishes

Colin

### Dr Colin Mendelsohn MB BS (Hons)

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**From:** [mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au) <[mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)>  
**Sent:** Friday, 5 August 2022 3:23 PM  
**To:** 'Steve Chadban (Sydney LHD)' <[Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)>  
**Subject:** RE: Vaping talk August 4

Hi Steve,

Young people should not smoke or vape. However, fears about youth vaping have been greatly exaggerated by the media and vaping opponents.

Most vaping by never-smoking youth is experimental and transient and of limited public health harm. Furthermore, the growing evidence suggests that vaping is diverting young people from smoking.

As you say, this is irrelevant to the medical prescription of nicotine vaping products for adult smokers. The immediate and devastating consequences of smoking by adults far outweighs any risk that vaping may cause to young people.

However, I understand the main reason for cancelling the presentation is a complaint by an unnamed physician who claims that I represent or am funded by tobacco companies. This claim is untrue and defamatory. I have never received payments from tobacco or e-cigarette companies or their subsidiaries.

The dominant Australian narrative is anti-vaping. The Australian Health Minister commissioned a [report](#) on vaping by the NCEPH at ANU. Unfortunately the report was seriously flawed. In response, I co-authored a critique of this report in the attached peer-reviewed article, recently published in Drug and Alcohol Review. You can see my disclosure in detail at the end of the paper.

We were also disappointed to see that the [NHMRC CEO statement](#) was flawed along similar lines. We are also currently preparing a response to that as well.

My views and those of my co-authors are in line with many overseas experts and organisations, including the UK Royal College of Physicians, Public Health England and NICE.

There are two reasons why I am telling you this

1. I appear to have been defamed. If this is true, I will be forced to take further action to have the record rectified unless I receive an apology and correction from the person involved.

2. As scientists we need to explore both sides of the evidence to find the truth, not censor the minority view. Vaping nicotine is legal in Australia, approved by the RACGP as a second-line therapy and strongly supported by the RANZCP. In my view, it is unethical to withhold a potentially lifesaving treatment which can help many to quit who would otherwise continue to smoke. Please see my articles for physicians and another for GPs attached.

For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to allow the presentation to go ahead. I am also happy to debate a vaping opponent so both sides of the argument can be presented.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Colin

**Dr Colin Mendelsohn MB BS (Hons)**

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**From:** Steve Chadban (Sydney LHD) <[Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)>

**Sent:** Thursday, 30 June 2022 12:28 PM

**To:** [mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)

**Cc:** Tracey Ying <[tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au](mailto:tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au)>

**Subject:** Re: Vaping talk August 4

Hi Colin

The recently published NHMRC position, support for that position from Chief Health Officers, recent media and concerns among our group re the uptake of illegal vaping by teenagers have made this a hot area, and a controversial one as you are well aware. I do appreciate that your key focus is vaping for smoking cessation, however the uptake by teenagers is causing more pressing concerns for us as a group. We will maintain a watch on this space and follow developments closely.

Regards

Steve

**Professor Steve Chadban, BMed(hons), PhD, FRACP, FAHMS**

Director, Renal Medicine, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and SLHD

Stream Director, Renal Medicine and Urology, Sydney Local Health District

Leader, Kidney Node, Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney

Kidney Centre, Level 2, Professor Marie Bashir Building,

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Missenden Road, Camperdown, NSW 2050

Phone 612 9515 1713, Fax 612 9515 1744

Email: [Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)

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**From:** "[mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)" <[mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)>

**Date:** Thursday, 30 June 2022 at 11:59 am

**To:** Steve Chadban <[Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)>

**Cc:** 'Tracey Ying' <[tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au](mailto:tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au)>

**Subject:** RE: Vaping talk August 4

Hi Steve,

That is a shame. Can you let me know why it is not going ahead now?

Best wishes

Colin

**Dr Colin Mendelsohn MB BS (Hons)**

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**From:** Steve Chadban (Sydney LHD) <[Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)>

**Sent:** Thursday, 30 June 2022 10:54 AM

**To:** [mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)

**Cc:** Tracey Ying <[tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au](mailto:tracey.ying@sydney.edu.au)>

**Subject:** Vaping talk August 4

Dear Colin

Thank you for accepting our earlier invitation to speak at our regular Renal Medicine meeting on Aug 4 on "Vaping as a tool for smoking cessation". Unfortunately we won't be able to proceed with this meeting. I hope we have not caused you any inconvenience with this change.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Steve Chadban, BMed(hons), PhD, FRACP, FAHMS**

Director, Renal Medicine, Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and SLHD

Stream Director, Renal Medicine and Urology, Sydney Local Health District

Leader, Kidney Node, Charles Perkins Centre, University of Sydney

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Phone 612 9515 1713, Fax 612 9515 1744

Email: [Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Steve.Chadban@health.nsw.gov.au)

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30/6/22

Hi Tracey,

I just wanted to confirm our arrangement for a Zoom talk on vaping.

We are still going ahead on Zoom on Thursday 4 August from 3-4pm?

By the way, I have an article being published tomorrow on vaping and nicotine prescribing for GPs in the Australian Journal of General Practice. A draft copy is attached FYI (please don't circulate). We can discuss some of this in the talk.

Please let me know if there are any other specific issues you would like covered.

Best wishes

Colin

**Dr Colin Mendelsohn MB BS (Hons)**

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24/2/22

Hi there,

Tracey Ying is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: Renal Department meeting - Thursday 3-4 pm

Time: This is a recurring meeting Meet anytime

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: <https://uni-sydney.zoom.us/j/446646775?pwd=N1lOYm55T2lxRWViWjMrdUMzYjRiQT09>

Password: kidneymeet

Or iPhone one-tap :

Australia: +61280156011,,446646775# or +61370182005,,446646775# Or Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location) :

Australia: +61 2 8015 6011 or +61 3 7018 2005 or +61 7 3185 3730 or +61 8 6119 3900 or +61 8 7150 1149

Meeting ID: 446 646 775

Password: 768853

International numbers available: <https://uni-sydney.zoom.us/j/kfXraUL38>

Or an H.323/SIP room system:

Dial: 446646775@@zmau.us

or <SIP:446646775@zmau.us>

or 103.122.166.55

Meeting ID: 446646775

Password: 768853

Or Skype for Business (Lync):

<https://uni-sydney.zoom.us/skype/446646775>

Need help using Zoom? Visit the Zoom Help Center: <https://support.zoom.us>

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15/2/22

Hi Tracey,

I would be delighted to speak at your Department meeting about smoking cessation.

I would suggest an overview of smoking and its relevance for kidney disease, first-line smoking cessation treatments available and the role of vaping nicotine.

Vaping is the most popular and most effective quitting aid in Australia but is poorly understood. It is often successful where other methods have failed and could be very helpful in this hard-to-treat population.

I am happy to lock in 7 July from 3-4pm by Zoom.

How much time should I allow for the presentation and for Q&A?

You can find out more about me at [www.colinmendelsohn.com.au](http://www.colinmendelsohn.com.au).

Attached is an article I wrote for Australian Prescriber this month which could be circulated to attendees if appropriate.

Best wishes

Colin

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**From:** Tracey Ying (Sydney LHD) <[Tracey.Ying@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Tracey.Ying@health.nsw.gov.au)>

**Sent:** Tuesday, 15 February 2022 3:59 PM

**To:** [mendel@bigpond.net.au](mailto:mendel@bigpond.net.au)

**Subject:** Invitation to speak at the RPA/Concord Hospital combined Department of Renal Medicine meeting

Dear Dr Mendelsohn

My name is Tracey Ying, I'm a Nephrologist & Transplant physician at the Department Renal medicine at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Prof David Gracey gave me your details and speaks highly of your presentations.

I organise the combined RPA/Concord Department of Renal Medicine meetings and would love to have you speak to your expertise on smoking cessation. The meeting is attended by staff specialist renal physicians, senior nurses, renal advance trainees, JMOs and PhD students. Smoking is a problem for many of our kidney transplant candidates and is often a significant barrier to kidney transplant listing.

Potential dates include: July 7th, Sept 1 or November 3. There are also a few other dates throughout the year, but it will be a smaller audience of RPA attendees only.

At this stage, meetings are still via Zoom on Thursday at 3-4 pm.

I understand you are busy, so appreciate you consideration.

Sincerely,

Tracey

Dr Tracey Ying

BSc(Med) MBBS MMed FRACP PhD

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