

Letter to the Editor

Hookah, opium and tobacco smoking in relation to oesophageal squamous cell carcinoma

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Sir,

Nasrollahzadeh *et al* (2008) report that the regular use of hookah in Iran 'may involve exposure to large amounts of tobacco combustion products' and that the intensity of hookah use (not duration, unlike *nass*) was associated with ESCC (oesophageal squamous cell carcinoma) risk. Certainly one feature of hookah use in countries, such as Iran, India and Pakistan, is the great related amount of tobacco; the weight equivalent of up to 60

cigarettes in the bowl (*chilam*) for one session (Sajid *et al*, 2008). In these conditions, the authors are right to assume that this practise might entail a risk factor for ESCC. However, in the light of recent studies on hookah smoking and cancer, a confusion factor may not have been taken into account. It deals with the fact that opium is also smoked, not only in the dedicated opium-only pipes described in detail by Nasrollahzadeh *et al* (2008), but, also, in the hookahs themselves, mixed or not with tobacco.

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