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The Prolonged Killer

            Throughout most of American history, tobacco has been a staple on the American life and economy. Since the Americans colonies were controlled by the British Empire, tobacco has been grown, sold, and exported in the North American region. Tobacco is one of the most addictive substances in the world. We are currently in a weird time in history because a good portion of the population agrees that smoking cigarettes is bad, but on the other hand, many younger people are getting into other types of smoking such as vapes or other e-cigarettes. These young people that are vaping and smoking other things are starting to become addicted to these substances without knowing the consequences with some of their rebuttals being, “well it’s better for your than smoking cigarettes.” These new types of smoking haven’t been around too long and we haven’t been able to research the long terms effects of these substances and yet many people are becoming addicted to them. Many people argue that smoking still has a great influence on America’s life and culture. While at one-point smoking was popular in America, I believe that it has out-lived its usefulness. Various types of smoking such as cigarettes, vapes, Juuls, and others forms of smoking should be exiled from our society. Smoking is a danger to our society and should be gotten rid of because of the damage it does to the users, the people around them, and also, the environment.

For my 19 years on this earth, people have known that smoking is a serious health risk, but yet thousands of people still continue to smoke today. According to the Center for Disease Control, or CDC, cigarette smoking causes more than 480,000 deaths every year in the United States alone (Health Effects). The CDC also states that smoking causes 90% of all lung cancer deaths. Smoking can pose many various health risks which include many different types of lung diseases, the lowering of sperm count in men, increase chance of a stroke, different types of blood related issues such as blood clots and blockages. Nicotine also has a lot of horrible effects on kids and teens. Along with all of these other harmful things smoking can cause, it can also cause brain developmental issues, anxiety, impulsivity, and mood swings in adolescents (The Effects of Nicotine). Vaping is also just as dangerous as smoking cigarettes. Many people believe that vaping or e-cigarettes are better than normal cigarettes which is true in the sense that they expose you to less toxic material, but they still cause many of the same diseases as cigarettes do (5 Truths). Smoking can also do a lot of harm because it is a factor in many people developing type II diabetes, but most importantly it is one of the most likely substance to give its user cancer. Cancer can develop in a dozen places throughout the body as a result of smoking (Smoking and Cancer). The most deadly one is lung cancer, but to me, the most horrible one is stomach cancer. The reason I believe that stomach cancer is the worst kind is because it’s what took my grandpa away from me and my family.

My Papa was a heavy smoking for most of his life. My grandma told me that he started smoking while he was in the Air Force when he was around the age of 23. He didn’t stop smoking until I was 8, I think, and by that time he had already been smoking for over 40 years. I have strong memories of me, my brothers, and my cousins all playing baseball in my grandpa’s front lawn while he sat of the front porch watching us while he smoked. I remember when I was about 5 the two of us sitting on the front porch of his house, I don’t remember what we were doing, but I do remember always asking him, “Why do you smoke Papa?” I remember always pestering him about smoking and I don’t think I was the sole reason why he quit, but I think he took a look at all of his grandkids and realized that if he didn’t stop, then he wouldn’t be able to see us all grow up. I believe that if he didn’t stop when he did, he wouldn’t have been able to see many things, like his grandkids graduate college, or get married or become a great grandfather. I don’t remember when I was told that he had stomach cancer, but I remember the day of his surgery like it was yesterday. It was the day before thanksgiving in 2015, and I remember waking up at 6 A.M to see him go into surgery, I remember everyone who was there, and I remember everything I was feeling that day. While the surgery was a success, it only bought him 2 more miserable years. Papa’s last 2 years were miserable. My grandfather is a stubborn man, he was the kind of man to do everything himself, he hated people having to do things for him, if he wanted to do something, there wasn’t anyone who was going to stop him. Papa’s personality is what caused his last years to be miserable, most of the time he was bed ridden, he couldn’t do anything himself because he was so weak. My Grandma, being the saint she is, was always there for him, whether it was getting something for him in the middle of the night, or changing out his bedsheets. My grandpa is lucky to have such a wonderful woman by his side because she really made his last years significantly easier. My Papa smoking didn’t just cause harm for him, he also caused harm to the people that were around him.

Secondhand smoke is just as harmful as smoking yourself. Exposing yourself to secondhand smoke could also cause many health hazards. One of the most dangerous things to do is for a pregnant woman to smoke, or for someone to smoke around her. This is because, smoking can cause many difficulties in the pregnancy including, the early delivering of a baby, still birth, low birth rate, and also a sudden infant death syndrome, also known as crib death. Second hand smoke doesn’t only effect babies, they can also harm children and adults too. According to the CDC, secondhand smoke can cause ear infections, severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections in children (Secondhand Smoke Facts). In adults, secondhand smoke can cause heart disease, lung cancer, and it puts them at a higher risk of having a stroke (Secondhand Smoke Facts). Marijuana is also thought to have secondhand smoke effects which causes the hardening and narrowing of the arteries (What You Need). E-cigarettes and vapes also emit the same kind of toxins that normal cigarettes produce, this also means that vaping has similar secondhand smoke effects that cigarettes do (What You Need). People aren’t the only things that get harmed by cigarettes, the environment also is being damaged by smoking.

Cigarettes are one of the most littered substances in the United States and it’s having horrible effects on our environment. According to the Truth Initiative, cigarettes and cigarette butts account for about 38% of all litter that was collected on U.S. roadways (Tobacco and the Environment). Personally, throughout my process of writing my journal, I have noticed dozens of times where people have left cigarette butts just lying on the ground, or people just being careless with these flammable objects. Cigarettes are also littered throughout the entire ocean. Data shows that over 1 million cigarette butts were found on U.S. beaches in 2016 (Tobacco and the Environment). Studies have also shown that nicotine from cigarettes find their way into the ocean and these toxins are very dangerous to the aquatic life there. One study has shown that one single cigarette, if soaked for 24 hours, have enough toxins in them to kill 50% of saltwater and freshwater fish if they’re exposed to it for 96 hours. According to Tobacco Free California, about 4.5 trillion cigarette and cigarette butts are littered into the environment every year (It’s Not Just Litter). One argument in favor of cigarettes could be that they’re decomposable, but in fact, it takes 10 years for a single cigarette to fully decompose (It’s Not Just Litter). Along with this, the cigarette filters are not biodegradable, they’re made of a type of plastic (It’s Not Just Litter). The best solution to keep our environment and people safe from cigarettes is to encourage smokers to quit and prevent the youth from even starting.

I believe that the most important way to control smoking is to attempt to stop the spread of it to the youth of our communities. If we can limit the number of kids and teens that start smoking, we could get rid of smoking that much easier. How I believe we should do this is to start and anti-smoking campaign. While this has already been done before, this one would have a focus on vaping and E-cigarettes because many people have a false concept of them, thinking that they are safe, or aren’t as dangerous. I think that this could be an effective strategy because a previous awareness campaign was proven to help over 100,000 people to quit smoking (Liss). Along with these 100,000 that have quit an additional 1.6 million are attempting to quit smoking. While cigarettes are still bad and we need to deal with this issue, E-cigarettes and vapes are the new forms of smoking and I believe that many will pick up these nasty habits instead of cigarettes. A study performed by Susan Fiore stated the nicotine patches is an effective aid to quit smoking (Fiore). Compared to other strategies, nicotine patches were twice as likely to quit smoking (Fiore). With this in mind, we could help many people who are struggling to quit smoking by forming a support group with people who are also trying to quit. We could also make nicotine patches more easily available for these people. I think we could do this be raising a new tax on cigarette and vape products. This tax wouldn’t affect people who don’t smoke, and it makes the cost of entry that much higher, meaning that it would be harder for people to start and continue to purchase these products. The funds raised from this tax would help fund the ad campaign, but realistically, this tax wouldn’t be enough to fully fund this project. The project might have to take some money from the Department of Health, or Environment under the assumption that this would help the environment and health of the people.

With the help of the people, we as a group can put an end to the epidemic. Smoking is one of the most evil killers in American and as a people, we need to take action against it. Smoking has taken too many lives for it to still be a normal thing to do. Smoking has killed too many smokers, it has killed too many bystanders, and if we don’t do anything about it now, it will kill our environment too. With the help of a new ad campaign, we can prevent the spread of cigarettes and inform the next generation of the horrors it causes to humans, but also the environment. We also need to show people the dangers of vapes and E-cigarettes and break the notion that they are better than cigarettes because they aren’t. Smoking is one of the most dangerous habits and we need to end its life before it ends ours.

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