

Transcript: Presentation by George Zlupko, MD, at AAHS on Wednesday, April 14, at 10 a.m.

"The word for, I guess, the last two years is pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic. That plus all the political stuff that's been going on has kind of wiped vaping right off the map. We don't talk about it anymore, we don't hear about it much anymore in the press but it remains as kind of a secondary pandemic. There's a lot going on with this [and] we're finding out a lot more of the harm that it causes...but rather than talking exclusively about vaping today--because you are tired of being beaten over the head with it, I know--I'd like to talk about you. The people in this room. This is an interesting time for you. You're at an age when you're trying to sort out a lot of things. You're confronted with real life situations, not only in your personal life, but on the internet, on social media; you're coming up against real life things and real life consequences. You're making choices, you're making choices about smoking, vaping and alcohol and relationships and all of that. It's important that you put this in perspective because at this time in your life--during your teenage years--you're rebellious, and how do I know that? because I was a teenager. I know you say, 'no, you weren't,' but yes I was. I was at one point a teenager and it's a rebellious time. People are telling you not to do things and you're saying, 'well, why can't I do those things? I should be able to do those things.' [But] people [then] are telling you to do things and you say, 'well, why do they tell us to do those things? They're stupid. I don't want to do those things.' Mom and dad, your teachers, I know you think they don't know anything right now, I can tell you, just wait a while and that feeling will go away and as you get older they will seem to get smarter. I could stand here and talk to you about all the horrible things that could happen to you if you vape. And there are horrible things. There is a long laundry list of diseases which can occur--I've seen them. The problem is those comments for you right now I think will fall to a large extent on deaf ears--why? Because you have the Iron Man theory. At this time in your life, 'nothing is going to happen to me, this won't happen to me, it will never happen to me. I can do what I want, I can do a little bit and I'll be able to stop.' Now, here's what I want to tell you: most of my patients, and I've been at this for a long time, are 50 years old or older, generally speaking. When I say that you go, 'wow, I'll never be 50!' and yes, you will and believe it or not, it's going to be faster than you think. These 50 year olds who come to me with terrible lung disease because they smoked, they didn't vape because vaping was not available to them then, they were teenagers once. You know these people, these are your mom or dad, your grandparents. They were teenagers at one time and thought, 'this will never happen to me. I'm going to smoke and I'll just give it up whenever I want to.' Three or four decades later, they're in my office, coughing, short of breath, wheezing and, and continuing to smoke even when we tell them what terrible lung disease they have and what's going to happen to them and how it's going to affect them. They continue to smoke. Why? Why do they continue to smoke? Well, they continue to smoke because they are addicted. Nicotine is the addictive substance. When you vape, you know, a pod for example has more nicotine in it than a pack of cigarettes. It does. And it only takes a couple pods and you're hooked. You really are. Let me just conclude by saying there's two bags of lies that are associated with vaping. The first bag is the lies that you are told. You are told them by maybe your friends: 'oh, this is fun, don't worry about it. Nothing will happen. Joey does it all the time and he looks okay.' Or the vaping companies, JUULs, things like that, they are going to tell you 'oh, this is cool, this is neat. Look how good you look.' You know, they have pictures of folks who are young and smoking away with their vapes. Those are lies. Those are the lies that you are told. But the worst lies, the worst lies, from the people I see as patients, are the lies you told yourself. The lies you told yourself. You told yourself that, 'this won't bother me. I will be able to get rid of this at any time that I want. It's not harmful to me.' So you want to realize this as you go through your time here, teenage years and your early adult life, and remember: don't lie to yourself. There are some facts about this. You want to understand them and want to do the best you can because someday you'll be 50 and older and I won't be around but my partners may be around and we don't want you to come to the office. We don't want you there."