THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA FOR THE TREATMENT OF CHRONIC PAIN; A REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF 35 CASES

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INTRODUCTION / AIM

The prescription of cannabis for medical use in Canada has been receiving an increasing amount of attention and has become a contentious subject of debate, due in part to a perceived lack of evidence relating to its therapeutic applications. However, marijuana use is becoming a more common and acceptable treatment for chronic pain. Although marijuana has been used for thousands of years for the treatment of various ailments including pain, arthritis and epilepsy, considerable resistance to its use exists not only in the general population but also among physicians. A major stigma still exists in North America, although attitudes are changing. The aim of this review is to describe the characteristics of patients who are prescribed medical marijuana or who are self treating with marijuana for chronic pain. Additionally, the positive and negative effects of marijuana in this cohort will be described.

METHODS

35 charts, which consist of the patients treated with marijuana over the past 5 years in a community chronic pain office, will be reviewed. The demographic characteristics of these patients will be described including age, sex, diagnosis, co-morbid disease, previous and current pain therapy. The side effects will be discussed. The % of patients who continue with marijuana will be calculated.

RESULTS

Preliminary results revealed that these patients span across all age groups and that there was no difference with regards to sex distribution. Additional analyses regarding other demographic characteristics, side effects, and treatment effectiveness are currently being conducted.

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS

While retrospective chart reviews have inherent issues with internal and external validity, they also have certain advantages, such as their feasibility, low cost, and hypothesis generation, among others. However, physicians must be able to make evidence-based decisions, and the lack of research regarding the use of medical marijuana for chronic pain could result in missed opportunities for potential treatment. If this treatment can be effective in the treatment of chronic pain, an already difficult medical problem to treat, it should not be held to a different standard than other commonly used medications.

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