



Perceived Risks and Benefits of Cannabis Use among Cancer Patients: Preliminary Results from a Survey of Patients

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BACKGROUND

- ✦ Cancer is a qualifying condition for the medical authorization of cannabis use in Florida; however, stigmas, previous exposure, and sociodemographic variables foster variable acceptance among physicians and patients.
- ✦ The Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center (SCCC) catchment area serves over 6 million residents of diverse ethnic/racial backgrounds with broad cancer disparities and barriers to healthcare access.

OBJECTIVE

- ✦ To examine the perceived risks and benefits of cannabis use among cancer patients in the SCCC catchment area.

METHODOLOGY

- ✦ A redcap-based survey was administered to patients over 18 at SCCC classified as being within 5 years of initial cancer treatment.
- ✦ Survey was created in collaboration with 11 other NCI-designated cancer centers to obtain a harmonized set of questions detailing demographics, cancer site, treatment history, and cannabis use.
- ✦ A preliminary analysis of responses from October 2021 – January 2023, was conducted using SAS Analytics to obtain the unadjusted frequencies of perceived risks and benefits associated with cannabis use before, during, and after cancer treatment among respondents. Not all respondents were cannabis consumers.

**75.2% of surveyed cancer patients who use cannabis reported improved pain management, stress relief, improved side effect management and increased appetite...
Cannabis makes a difference**

Participant Characteristics (n=295)		Cannabis Users Overview	
Median Age	47.5 years	Previous cannabis use (n=270)	64.8%
White	77.3%	Current cannabis user (n=175)	65.7%
Black	9.49%	Cannabis use stress management (n=115)	33.9%
Hispanic	44.9%	Cannabis use for pain relief (n=115)	30.4%
Undergoing Cancer Treatment	36.6%	Symptom improvement, moderate to major, (n=119)	80.2%
High Prevalence Cancers	14.9% Breast 6.5% Prostate 6.2% Leukemia 6.2% Lymphoma		

Cannabis: Benefits & Risks	
Benefit to Cannabis use (n=266)	75.2%
<i>Notable Reported Benefits: pain management, stress relief, side effect management, decreased nausea, increased appetite, and improved sleep</i>	
Risk to Cannabis use (n=266)	58.2%
<i>Notable Reported Risks: daytime somnolence, headaches, and difficulty concentrating</i>	
Comfort discussion Cannabis with SCCC physicians (n=115)	72.7%
Difficulty explaining Cannabis use to family & friends (n=266)	27.8%

RESULTS

- ✦ Benefits for cannabis use were reported in 75.2% of surveyed patients, noting pain management, stress relief, side effect management, and increased appetite as benefits for cannabis use.
- ✦ About a third of patients noted cannabis use for stress relief (33.9%) and pain relief (30.4%).
- ✦ Among patients who experienced symptom improvement (n=115), 80.2% noted moderate to major improvements in symptom management with cannabis use.

CONCLUSION

- ✦ Preliminary results indicate that the majority of cancer patients who use cannabis report benefits and symptom improvement.
- ✦ 58% of respondents report cannabis related side effects as perceived risks
- ✦ Future studies should examine the risks and benefits via prospective designs.
- ✦ Prevention or Intervention Education Programs may consider including potential mitigation for daytime somnolence, headaches and difficulty concentrating to be inclusive of potential outcomes of cannabis use.

NEXT STEPS

- ✦ Prospective study designed to examine prospective effect of cannabis use on primary cancer treatment and side effect management.
- ✦ Focus groups for deeper understanding.