

Background

- A 2016 national survey on individuals seeking medical cannabis found a 333% increase in people over the age of 65 and a 455% increase in people aged 55 to 65
- Legalization of cannabis at state level has improved access to medical cannabis as an alternative treatment
- Many older adults believe that medical cannabis can provide similar effectiveness with reduced side effects compared to conventional treatments
- Current research evidence on this population is limited
 - This is especially concerning due to increased health risks in older adults
- There is a critical need for research examining the benefits and risks associated with medical cannabis use among older adults

Purpose

- This review was conducted to:
- synthesize literature within the past 3 to 5 years
 - identify knowledge gaps to be investigated in future research

Findings

Access and Barriers

- Major barriers include:
 - Cost
 - Lack of knowledge in prescribing medical cannabis within primary care
 - Stigma surrounding medical cannabis use
- Barriers may lead individuals to self-treat without consulting healthcare professionals

Product Use Patterns

- Older adults are more likely to:
 - Use sublingual tinctures
 - Use products with a lower CBD:THC ratio
 - Start their treatment with lower THC and higher CBD products
- Many older adults experience difficulty with the lack of dosing and product recommendations

Potential Benefits

- Conditions that may benefit from medical cannabis include:
 - Chronic pain
 - Sleep problems
- Conditions that need more evidence include:
 - Mood/mental health
 - Behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia
 - Nausea and vomiting

Potential Adverse Effects

- Common side effects associated with medical cannabis include:
 - Dizziness
 - Drowsiness
 - Fatigue
 - Dry mouth
- Increases in cardiovascular risk and neurocognitive side effects could be especially concerning in older adults

Inconsistent Evidence

Evidence remains controversial regarding using medical cannabis for various conditions such as pain, end-stage cancer, Parkinson's disease, and Alzheimer's disease/dementia in older adults.

Conclusions

- Medical cannabis treatment seems to be well-tolerated in older adults
 - Treatment is mostly associated with mild adverse events and side effects
 - CBD-only treatments tend to have fewer adverse effects
- There is a need for policies to improve access and reduce the costs associated with obtaining medical cannabis
- Randomized clinical trials are the next step to determine the efficacy and impacts of medical cannabis for older adults
 - It is important to study products that are commonly used in the real world
- Rigorous and systematic research can be useful in establishing standardized dosing procedures and providing more consistent evidence for various conditions

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