

# Reasons for interest or non-interest in medical marijuana as a treatment among older adults with chronic pain: An analysis of open-ended survey response

NOT

INTERESTED

IN MM

(n=47)

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### **BACKGROUND**

- Medical marijuana (MM) use is becoming more common, especially among older adults
- Chronic pain is a main reason reported for MM use
  - Older adults may seek MM as an alternative treatment to conventional pain medications<sup>1</sup>
- One study found that among older adults<sup>2</sup>:
  - 69% felt that marijuana could potentially provide pain relief
  - 57% believed that conventional pain medications had more prevalent side effects
  - conventional believed medications had a higher addiction risk
- There is a need to understand contributory factors on the decision to use MM

### **OBJECTIVE**

 This study aims to explore reasons for interest or non-interest in using MM among older adults with chronic pain

# **METHODS**

### **STUDY SAMPLE**

- Data derived from the Study on Medical marijuana and Its Long-term Effects (SMILE)
  - Ongoing prospective cohort study in Florida
  - 12 month follow up
  - Recruitment methods include UF Consent2Share and PRICE registries, UF Health and MM clinics, flyers, radio advertising, and word of mouth
- 139 individuals aged 50 years and older with non-cancer chronic musculoskeletal or neuropathic pain

### **MEASURES AND ANALYSIS**

- Participants responded to open-ended questions on their intention to use or not use MM at the SMILE baseline visit
- Thematic coding was conducted using NVivo software
  - Similar codes were grouped to generate themes and subthemes
    - Interested in MM (n=92)
    - Not Interested in MM (n=47)

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### RESULTS

# **Alternative Treatment (45.7%)** "I have exhausted the doctor prescription for pain "Do not like the way it [Florida MM Program] is route, MM is my last chance to return to a normal

### Lack of Options (16.3%)

"I have used all options (medications, therapy, surgery) with no resolve"

### Perception of Harm (15.2%)

"I believe natural remedies are good solutions with fewer negative effects"

### Potential Efficacy (15.2%)

"Seen pain relief it has given people"

# Quality of Life (1.1%)

"[I] would like a better quality of life"

### **Improve Mental Health** (5.4%)

"Lots of people have said that it helps with depression... there's been pretty good feedback"

# **Improve Physical Health (3.3%)**

"Looking for a treatment that will allow me to improve my physical health"

## Relieve Pain (50%)

"I have used gabapentin for over 24 years for my neuropathy resulting from Guillain-Barre. At times I feel... it's losing its effectiveness"

### **Employment Impacts (14.9%)**

managed and may affect my job"

# Side Effects (25.5%)

"I don't want to feel high/out of touch with reality"

### **Efficacy (12.8%)**

"I am not convinced it would work"

# **Safety (12.8%)**

"Don't feel comfortable using it"

# Affordability (6.4%)

"Too expensive, not covered by insurance"

## **Perception of Drugs** (10.6%)

"Like to keep my system as clean as I can"

# **Prefer Current Treatment** (8.5%)

"I don't feel I have severe enough chronic pain to warrant using medical marijuana"

### **Negative Past Experience (12.8%)**

"When much younger, after experimenting with marijuana, I was left feeling stupid. Though I recognize marijuana may have benefits I am not interested in feeling stupid again"

### CONCLUSIONS

### **INTERESTED IN MM**

- The desire to use MM as an alternative to conventional pain treatments and relieve pain were among the most reported reasons for interest
- Individuals interested in using MM have more positive perceptions of MM compared to those not interested
  - These findings are similar to previous perceptions of research treatment<sup>2</sup>

### **NOT INTERESTED IN MM**

- Concerns surrounding side effects was the most reported reason for non-interest, followed by employment impacts, safety and efficacy of MM, and negative past experiences using marijuana
- Individuals not interested in MM considered satisfaction with current treatments, along with potential risks of using MM
  - This is consistent with the health belief model<sup>3</sup>

### **TAKEAWAYS**

- The findings from this study can help to inform educational interventions and tools for patients interested in MM treatment
  - Information on the potential benefits, risks, and safety of MM use
  - Resources for individuals needing financial and/or employment support
- Future observational studies treatments should consider adjusting for preexisting attitudes and beliefs
- There is a need for further qualitative studies on attitudes and perceptions of MM treatment among this population



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<sup>2.</sup> National Poll on Healthy Aging: older adults' perspectives on medical marijuana. 2018.

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INTERESTED

IN MM

(n=92)

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https://www.healthyagingpoll.org/reports-more/report/older-adults-perspective-medicalmarijuana. 3. Janz NK, Becker MH. The Health Belief Model: a decade later. Health Educ Q. 1984 Spring;11(1):1-47. doi: