

Abstract.

Self-reported cannabis use in patients referred to The Palliative Care Unit at a University Hospital in Copenhagen.

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Introduction: January 1, 2018 it became legal for doctors in Denmark to prescribe medical cannabis. Due to this law, we wanted to examine to what extent patients referred to specialist palliative care used cannabis. We asked patients if cannabis was used or not, for which symptoms it was taken, if cannabis relieved any symptoms and if any side effects were experienced.

Materials and methods: The catchment area for our unit is 5-600.000 people. About 600 patients are referred per year to the unit. All newly referred and visited patients were asked about cannabis use after a prespecified questionnaire by the visiting doctor. The registration was done prospectively and consecutively from May 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018. The patient had to sign an informed consent. The exclusion criteria by protocol were imminently dying, or not wanting to participate in the study. Data were analyzed using SPSS.

Results: During the specified 6 months 286 patients were visited. Of those 198 (69%) were included. The reasons for exclusion were numerous. Exclusions by protocol consisted of 7 (2,4%) patients, who did not want to participate and 2 (0,7%) patients were imminently dying. Exclusions not allowed by protocol consisted of no informed consent form, 5 (1,7%) patients, not able to speak Danish, 3 (1%) patients, hearing loss, 1 (0,3%) patient, secretary closed the project during vacation, 7 (2,4%) patients and finally were 63 (22%) never asked to enter the project. Patients not invited to participate were evenly distributed over the period of inclusion.

Epidemiology				
Sex	Age (years)	Diagnose	Abuse	
Female 93 (47%)	Median 67,3	Cancer 165 (83%)	Never 163 (82%)	
Male 105 (53%)	Mean 68	Other 33 (17%)	Former 28 (14%)	
	Range 27-92		Currently 7 (4%)	
Cannabis				
Cannabis	Type of cannabis	Why do you take cannabis?	Does it relieve symptoms?	Side effects
Yes 50 (25%)	THC 16 (32%)	Nausea 6 (12%)	Yes 19 (38%)	Yes 13 (26%)
No 148 (75%)	CBD 28 (56%)	Pain relief 20 (40%)	No 15 (30%)	No 35 (70%)
	Dronabinol 7 (14%)	Increase appetite 6 (12%)	Don't know 16 (32%)	
	Marinol 1 (2%)	Sleep disorder 8 (16%)		
	Other 15 (30%)	Antineoplastic effect 22 (44%)		
		Other 15 (30%)		

Using Fisher's exact Test and Pearson Chi-Square Test no significant difference between THC and CBD concerning sex, cancer or not, side effects or whether it was used as an antineoplastic drug or not was found.

Conclusion: Twenty five percent of visited patients used cannabis of some kind. Cannabis use was equally distributed between male and female. Thirty eight percent of users experienced symptom relief. There was no consistency between the reason why patients used cannabis and the symptoms they experienced relief for. One fourth of the users experienced side effects. The majority of patients used CBD, and many used it in combination with THC.