

## **WHY DO PEOPLE USE MEDICAL MARIJUANA FOR REASONS OTHER THAN IT'S PRESCRIBED**

It's still not entirely clear how many medical marijuana patients are using their medical marijuana for reasons other than it was initially prescribed for. Many patients have found relief from anxiety or PTSD as well as insomnia.

Researchers studied 217 adults who presented to a California dispensary, published in The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse in 2014. These patients had been receiving medical cannabis for physical or health conditions on average for 10.3 years. They were approached by study staff when they arrived at the dispensary, and given a flyer that described the study in detail and offered \$100 for bi-weekly drawings as compensation for participation.

The majority used cannabis for what you would expect, anxiety, chronic pain, stress, PTSD and/or depression. One-quarter of the patients used cannabis for purposes of appetite, headache, nausea, muscle spasm, and PTSD. Out of that quarter, half of those patients reported a reduction in other symptoms.

Out of 25% of patients that were identified in this study, half of them, 13%, reported that they were using cannabis for other symptoms and were exhibiting relief.

Now the researchers thought that maybe the result of patients making an initially poor selection on their product, (the wrong THC to CBD ratio or a strain) may have resulted in the relief of other symptoms. And if the initial selection could have been improved, patients may have seen a better relief from the first symptom. It's hard to say.

In any case, the rates of dependence were greatest among patients with muscle spasm and nausea. Patients with muscle spasm and nausea are some of the most debilitated patients within the medical marijuana community, and they do tend to get significant benefit from the drug, and subsequently do report a higher level of dependence. The lowest amount of dependence was in patients with chronic pain.

And, excess use of cannabis, possibly inappropriate use, was associated with patients who experienced altered perception, a sense of celebration, enjoyment of the drug with alcohol, complaints of boredom, or patients who felt they needed help with greater coping.

It appears that individuals with suicidal levels of depression or disruption in sleep maybe less likely to develop problematic use patterns. It also appears that the use of medical marijuana in these conditions may reduce the significance of the insomnia or the suicidal depression.

There's two big takeaways. We really need to continue to look at what strain of marijuana is most suited to each individual diagnoses. And we need to better understand the influences of

use. People appear to use this drug, and other drugs, for purposes other than it's prescribed, or intended purpose, and getting to the bottom of exactly why and how that happens, can help us to direct patients to get the best benefit from the drug possible.