

Medical cannabis: Four patient perspectives

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Abstract

The use of medical cannabis has been increasing in recent years. This paper provides the perspectives of four patients with very different clinical backgrounds and their reported experiences using medical cannabis. Not all patients respond the same way to cannabis, and effective use requires a degree of experimentation as these patients' perspectives illustrate. In these perspectives it is important to note the reported effective management of specific symptoms, but also of importance is the reported improvement in general wellbeing and vast improvement in reported quality of life.

Keywords: Cannabis, medical cannabis, case stories

Introduction

As the research into the clinical utility of medical cannabis continues, the significant benefits of using cannabis in patient care is becoming clear. There are varying degrees of effectiveness that have been reported on specific symptoms and symptom management as it relates to particular active components in the plant. But it has become clear that there is more to the use of the plant as a whole than just its constituting components. Similarly, many patients are reporting significant benefits on specific symptoms such as pain or nausea while also reporting improvements in their ability to cope with their symptoms, translating to improvements in their general wellbeing. Not intended to provide detailed case reports, this paper provides the perspectives of four patients with very different clinical backgrounds and their reported experiences using medical cannabis. The names and details for each of the patients has been altered to protect their privacy and maintain confidentiality. Consent was obtained from each patient to report on the information presented in this article.

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Case story 1

Jon is a 32-year-old male, actively working as an independent business owner, and has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He is currently managing both symptoms of pain and typical symptoms related to his PTSD diagnosis. Prior to his introduction to cannabis, Jon's symptoms were being managed by 8 pharmaceutical medications. Since his introduction to cannabis, Jon reports that all of his symptoms are effectively controlled with self-regulated doses of up to 7-8 g of cannabis per day. He consumes his cannabis primarily through vaporizing, but also uses extracted oil – adding it to butter to consume with his meals – tincture, and occasionally he smokes. As a result of this shift to cannabis, he is no longer using any pharmaceutical medications. Jon has experimented with several cultivars (strains) of cannabis but reports that four specific cultivars have been most effective. These varieties include Luminarium (26-29% THC; 0-0.2% CBD), Elevare (21-24%; 0-0.2% CBD), Sedamen (20-23% THC; 0% CBD), and Eran Almog (28% THC; 0% CBD). Jon reports that his cannabis regime has helped with both symptom management and general wellbeing. "...it works very well, helps take the edge off, and helps regulate symptoms of my PTSD."

Case story 2

Michael is a retired 73-year-old male diagnosed with a lower lumbar spine injury. As a result of this injury he is coping with symptoms of burning sensations, intense pain in his feet and legs, and extreme fatigue. In managing these symptoms, his physician has prescribed him oxycontin, however, varying dosage regimes have had a marginal effect on pain and produced a side effect that makes him very drowsy. Under physician guidance, Michael began to supplement his oxycontin regime with cannabis, specifically the cultivars Avidekel (0-1.3% THC; 15-18% CBD) and Midnight (7-10% THC, 10-13% CBD), at a dosage of 1g per day. Michael's preference is for inhalation, specifically smoking and occasional vaporization.

As a result of his cannabis use, Michael reported that his pain symptoms are significantly reduced and,

when inhaled, the burning sensations are immediately soothed. This effect allowed him to reduce his oxycontin intake by 60%. Michael indicated that the oxycontin was the source of his fatigue and this reduction translated into having more energy. "I'm not sleeping as much during the day... I fall asleep faster at night. More active, able to dance again."

Most notably for Michael was his general improvement in his perceived quality of life. "We (my wife and I) have our lives back! I am able to go out with my wife, I can dance, I can spend quality time with her and do the things I have always loved to do. It has changed my whole life. I no longer have to sleep 16 hours a day anymore."

Case story 3

Rose is a retired 67-year-old female that has been diagnosed with diffused systemic scleroderma and pulmonary fibrosis. The primary symptoms of her condition are muscle and nerve pain and sleep deprivation. To manage these symptoms she is currently on a prescribed drug regime that includes myfortic, dexilant, motilium, pentoxifylline, oxycontin, dimenhydrinate (gravol), and hydroxychloroquine. Under the guidance of her family doctor, Rose is orally consuming cannabis oil extracts that she adds to her food and drinks. She primarily prepares her cannabis oil doses from cultivars including Avidekel (0-1.3% THC; 15-18% CBD) for daytime, Eran Almog (28% THC; 0% CBD), Stellio (22-25% THC; 0% CBD), Sedamen (20-23% THC; 0% CBD), and Luminarium (26-29% THC; 0% CBD) for nighttime. For her symptoms, Rose has reported that cannabis is providing exceptional pain management to the extent that she no longer requires the oxycontin. Her cannabis regime is also effectively managing her nausea and she no longer needs dimenhydrinate. In terms of her quality of life and wellbeing, Rose is reporting a significant improvement and attributing it to the cannabis. "It's given me a bit of my life back. The pain relief is amazing. I had been on so many different kinds of medications that were not touching on the pain. Avidekel has really helped with my daytime wellbeing."

Case story 4

Cole is 25-year-old male, currently employed. In January 2014 while on vacation, Cole dove into water from a height of 30 feet and hit his head. He was carried out of the water and couldn't walk for several weeks. He has been diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome, spinal concussion, injury to his upper cervical atlas bone, a shifted C1 vertebra, and inflammation in the brain. As a result of these injuries, he is coping with several symptoms including migraine headaches, severe neck pain, and back pain, all of which are causing depression. In coping with these symptoms, his physician prescribed several pain medications that Cole reported had little effect and actually made him feel worse. When low on traditional options, his physician suggested trying medical cannabis. Cole began experimenting with CBD cultivars, specifically Avidkel (0-1.3% THC; 15-18% CBD), but eventually switched to cultivars containing THC as well. He found that the presence of the THC resulted in a more immediate and effective reduction of his pain. Cole also reported a general loss of appetite and subsequent weight loss on traditional pain medications, and that cannabis use provided the pain management without affecting his appetite. In his own words, "Normal everyday activities that are extremely easy for everyone, like talking or walking, making a bowel movement, or sexual intercourse, used to be extremely painful." In addition to his reported success with pain management from cannabis, his improvement in general wellbeing is also of note. "As soon as I use it I feel immediate relief... Cannabis has affected my general wellbeing by helping me live almost completely normally, which at one point I thought would never be possible."

Conclusion

Medical cannabis is now an established option in a physician's medical toolkit. Its utility is derived from the whole-plant mixture of active components and it is the relative proportion of these components that differentiates cannabis cultivars from one another, their subsequent effects on symptom management, and how the active components are processed by the

patient's physiology. However, like all medications, not all patients will respond the same way. Thus, cannabis requires a degree of experimentation as these patients' perspectives have illustrated. It is important to note the reported effective management of specific symptoms, but also of great importance is the patient's reported improvement in general wellbeing and vast improvement in quality of life.

Conflict of interest

The author is a consultant to MedReleaf, an authorized grower and distributor of medical cannabis in Canada. The perspectives presented in this article are from individuals who obtain their medical cannabis from MedReleaf.

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References

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