



Introduction

Research from our group shows that marijuana can improve psychosocial wellbeing and quality of life in Head and Neck cancer (HNC) patients

Original research article | [Open Access](#) | Published: 02 September 2019

Survival outcomes of marijuana users in p16 positive oropharynx cancer patients

Han Zhang, Michael Xie, Marc Levin, Stuart D. Archibald, B. Stanley Jackson, J. E. M. Young & Michael K. Gupta

Journal of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery. 48, Article number: 43 (2019) | [Cite this article](#)

1367 Accesses | 1 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

> JAMA Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg. 2018 Nov 1;144(11):1017-1022.
doi: 10.1001/jamaoto.2018.0486.

Association of Marijuana Use With Psychosocial and Quality of Life Outcomes Among Patients With Head and Neck Cancer

Han Zhang ¹, Michael Xie ², Stuart D Archibald ², B Stanley Jackson ¹, Michael K Gupta ¹

Affiliations + expand
PMID: 30073295 PMCID: PMC6248184 DOI: 10.1001/jamaoto.2018.0486
[Free PMC article](#)

Study Purpose: To describe HNC patients’ perspectives on, acceptability and practices of medical marijuana

Results

- 58 HNC patients completed the questionnaire
- 53% were marijuana-naïve
- 21% were actively using marijuana

Of the patients who use marijuana:

- 75% use marijuana 1-3x/day
- 12.5% use 1-2x/month
- 12.5% use 1x every few months

- Last use patterns ranged from 45-50 years ago to today

Of the patients who had used/currently using marijuana – benefits for:

- **Headache**
- **Pain**
- **Nausea**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Sleep**
- **Anxiety/Depression**
- **Relaxation**

- Patients prefer to use marijuana in the route of delivery of:
 - 1) Tablet (62%)
 - 2) Transdermal (33%)
 - 3) Smoking (26%)

Actual route of use pattern:
65% smoking

- Patients were **concerned** about the
 - 1) **Cost** of medical marijuana (38%)
 - 2) **Cancer** potential (21.1%)
 - 3) **Psychosocial** side effects (41.1%)

- 68% of patients actively undergoing cancer treatment at the time of the study believed **marijuana would help with adverse symptoms during treatment**

Methods

Design: Prospective questionnaire study

Questionnaire: 16-questions delivered to patients on paper while waiting for HNC clinic appointment. Written consent obtained.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Confirmed diagnosis of head and neck cancer.
- Cancer being managed at a tertiary oncology hospital
- >18 years of age.
- Able to read/write in English (or translator).

Division of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton
Patient Cannabis Survey - 2019

1) Would you consider cannabis derived medications (CBD, THC) as treatment for cancer related symptoms i.e. pain, anxiety, nausea, loss of appetite?
(Check answer)
☐ YES
☐ NO

2) What are your reasons for considering cannabis treatment?
(Answer in space below)

3) What concerns you about use of cannabis derived medications?
(Check all that apply)
☐ Cost
☐ Cancer Potential
☐ Psychosocial side effects
☐ Other _____

4) What route of delivery would you prefer, if you were to use cannabis derived medications?
(Check all that apply)
☐ Smoking
☐ Tablet
☐ Cream
☐ Other _____

Anecdotes from patients about why they would want to try medical marijuana:

- “Friends have benefitted”
- “To improve quality of life for medical issues not improved by conventional medicine”
- “If it works why not”
- “I’d rather smoke cannabis then take pills”
- “Anything that works – I will do”
- “Anything to feel better”
- “Will try anything that will assist in treatment”
- “If it takes the pain away by all accounts it should be tried”

Discussion

Disconnect between preferred route of use and actual use patterns.

- Cost? “*I can’t afford eating it*”
- Ease of access?
- Patient Understanding?

Conclusion

- Marijuana is generally acceptable among HNC patients
- Patients are using medical marijuana and want to learn more.
- HNC teams should be able to safely prescribe and educate their patients on medical marijuana in an evidence-based manner.

A clinical trial to evaluate the efficacy of medical marijuana in improving QOL in HNC patients is the next step...

Prior to that – more feasibility data on the acceptability of medical marijuana among HNC patients is needed

There is no understanding of how marijuana is perceived and used among HNC patients