

Using cannabis for pain management after spinal cord injury: A qualitative study

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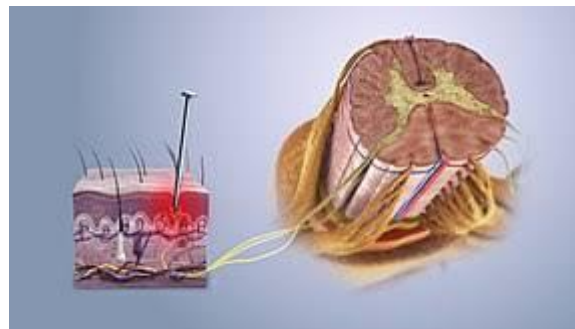
R. H. Acland.

Background - Pain, pain, and more pain...

One of the most common and debilitating secondary complications following SCI

Chronic pain after SCI estimated to be between 66% and 79%

Few management options provide adequate pain relief



The cannabis conundrum...

'Epilepsy Seizures Cured after
Ingesting Cannabis Oil With
High Counts of CBD'



How many more reports do you need
to see before we decriminalize
cannabis and hemp so we can use
them for all their thousands of uses?

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The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids

THE CURRENT STATE OF EVIDENCE AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana:
An Evidence Review and Research Agenda

Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice

Health and Medicine Division

A Report of
The National Academies of
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

The cannabis conundrum...

NEW ZEALAND / HEALTH

Medical cannabis 'a remarkably useful drug'

2:52 pm on 20 July 2019

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Karoline Tuckey, Journalist
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New Zealand GPs need to prepare themselves for prescribing medical cannabis to patients, a visiting UK expert says.

NEW ZEALAND / POLITICS

Parliamentary Bill enables cannabis referendum process

6:55 pm on 29 July 2019

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A bill enabling a referendum on whether to legalise cannabis to be held with the 2020 General Election has been introduced to Parliament today.

POLITICS / HEALTH

Medicinal cannabis 'false hope' for chronic pain sufferers - pain doctors

12:51 pm on 12 July 2019

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 Charlie Dreaver, Political Reporter
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Pain management doctors are worried the hype of medicinal cannabis is giving chronic pain patients false hope.

2012/13 New Zealand health survey

- 11% of adults (397,000) reported using cannabis in the last 12 months
- 42% (167,000) reported that use cannabis for medicinal purposes

Study context



Anecdotal reports suggest the use of cannabis in SCI populations is common

Critical that clinicians, researchers, individuals who may choose to use cannabis are informed

Minimal research exploring user perspectives

Important that user perspectives contribute to the clinical, social and political discussion

Study aim:

To understand why individuals with SCI choose to use cannabis and their experiences in doing so

Methods

Semi structured interviews were conducted with people who:

- Had a spinal cord injury
- Experienced pain
- self-reported use of cannabis to manage their pain
- Were 18 years or older

Exclusion criteria:

- Cognitive impairment e.g. brain injury

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subject to thematic analysis.

Results

Characteristic	N (%)
Age (years)	
20 – 39	1 (13)
40 – 59	5 (63)
60 +	2 (25)
Gender	
Male	6 (75)
Female	2 (25)
Ethnicity	
NZ European	5 (63)
NZ Māori	2 (25)
Other	1 (13)
SCI level	
C1 – C4	1 (13)
C5 – C8	5 (63)
T1 – S5	2 (25)
Method of cannabis use	
Edibles	5 (63)
Smoking	3 (38)

Three participants interviewed in person

Five interviewed via videoconference

Interviews range between 35-60 minutes



Theme one: the prison of pain

Participants reported living in unbearable pain. This experience was akin to feeling trapped in a prison: there was an overwhelming feeling of loss of control over one's situation and choices.

It just takes over your, your life. I mean when you have the pain you can't do anything, you know? You can barely talk, um, and, um, it just, the pain just overtakes everything. (Participant 6)



Theme two: the prescribed drugs don't work

Conventional medication strategies were often ineffective, had detrimental side-effects, or both. Common effects were drowsiness, fatigue, and being unable to engage in the activities important to them:

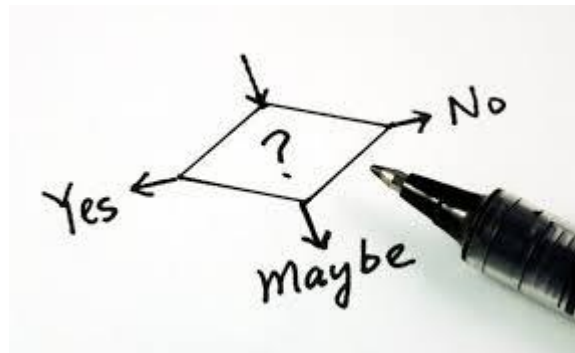
It dulls the pain but then I'm sleepy and feel like a bit of a zombie, I don't really like it, that's not the way I wanna live really. (Participant 4)



Theme three: choosing to use cannabis

When making a choice to use cannabis it was necessary to identify the right cannabis product that effectively managed pain but did not create unhelpful levels of euphoria:

I'm not wanting to get stoned all day, every day because that's not me, but I get to live every day. There's a big difference. (Participant 3)



Theme four: free to pursue meaningful outcomes

Cannabis products ‘freed’ participants from their prison of pain and enabled participants to participate in daily activities, when titrated to the level they preferred:

I can feel like doing something... I make a point of getting up and doing things for the boys, yah know? (Participant 4)



Theme five: negotiating and unfamiliar illegal context

Participants described blurred lines between the positive impact on pain and the negative perceptions that influenced their experience of using cannabis:

Oh in my former life, if someone mentioned cannabis I would have thrown my arms up in horror. I think this is a last resort because you're always waiting to see what will help. (Participant 6)



Theme six: you can't always get what you want

Participants often experienced much uncertainty in an environment prone to irregularity of supply, inconsistent cannabinoid composition, a lack of guidance from health professionals and potentially criminal consequences:

If you're not going to grow it yourself, you're then therefore left to buy it... you don't know what you're getting, I've had instances where I've bought the wrong product. Where's, where's the fairness in that?
(Participant 3)



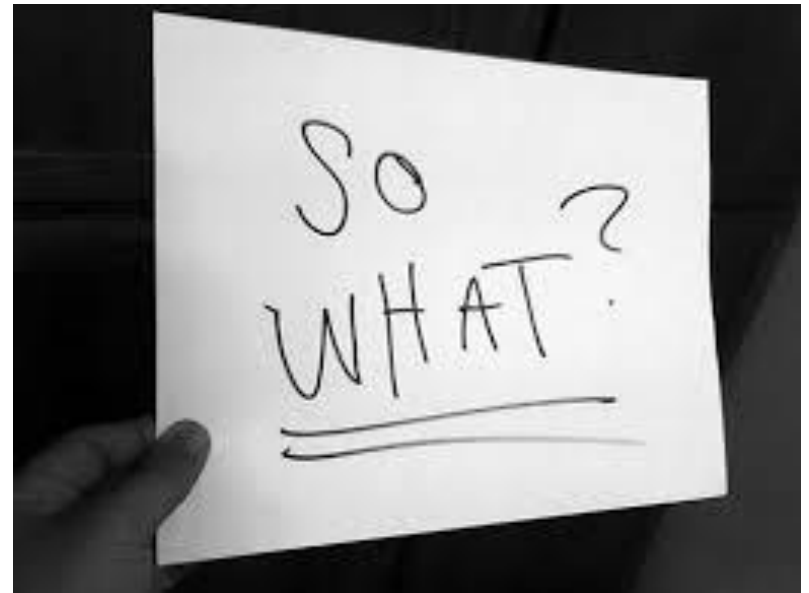
Conclusions

- Reduced pain and increased participation
- Not so ‘foggy’ or in ‘zombie state’
- Participants well informed about products
- Unpredictability of accessing unregulated illegal products
- Future research focus on meaningful outcomes (and not just pain intensity changes)



Conclusions

- More research needed
 - User perspectives
 - Health professionals
 - Suppliers
- An increased focus on endocannabinoid system to manage pain



Implications of Medicinal Cannabis Scheme

Education for health professionals

Licensing concerns

Specialist sign off



Medicinal cannabis licensing too high - growers

Audio **Life And Society** 12 Jul 2019

Medicinal cannabis companies say that licensing fees costing tens of thousands may prevent small growers getting into the market.

It would cost a small time cultivator between \$14,000 and almost... (AUDIO)



Medicinal cannabis regulations: Questions raised over specialist sign-off

Audio **Health** 11 Jul 2019

The Ministry of Health has released its proposed regulations which cover cultivation, licensing, manufacture and supply of medicinal cannabis. What could this mean for GPs who will be on the... (AUDIO)

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