



Hot topic

The medical use of Cannabis for the treatment of epilepsy L'utilisation médicale de Cannabis dans le traitement de l'épilepsie



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Marijuana or Cannabis (Hashish in Morocco is an addictive drug that is widely used and which is illegal in most countries. Morocco is the biggest producer in the world with around 23%.

This substance has shown many medical

benefits in several medical conditions and is by consequence gaining more and more interest from the medical society. In countries where medical use of marijuana is legal, a number of people with epilepsy report beneficial effects from using marijuana, including a decrease in seizure activity. Those who promote the medical use of marijuana often include treatment of epilepsy in the long list of disorders for which marijuana is supposed to be helpful. One particular study has shown very encouraging results in infants with intractable epilepsy [1]. All of this has encouraged the FDA to approve studies on a medicinal form of marijuana for the treatment of intractable epilepsy in children [2].



There is, however, very little scientific literature to back up these claims. There is a single, small, randomized controlled clinical trial that demonstrates the effectiveness of marijuana use for the treatment for epilepsy in humans [3]. There is some

scientific evidence from animal studies regarding the effectiveness of marijuana (or the active ingredient in marijuana, most notably tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) for the management of epilepsy. Some animal studies suggest that THC can control seizures not responsive to other treatments. It is important to know that not all animal studies reflect what actually occurs in humans. Other studies

show that THC can actually trigger seizures in addition to other adverse psychoactive effects (including depression and psychosis that can also occur with the use of marijuana.) Also, the withdrawal effects of marijuana on seizure activity have not been well studied. In addition, the effect that marijuana has on antiepileptic medication blood levels is largely unknown. Many legal and illegal ingested substances can alter levels of antiepileptic medications leading to increases seizures or toxic side effects. Use of marijuana can negatively affect memory (which is also a well-known side effect of many antiepileptic drugs), that in turn can lead to missed medication doses and result in an increased risk of seizures. Finally, there is the potential for pulmonary (lung) complications from the inhalation of marijuana.

There is currently limited scientific data to support the use of marijuana in the treatment of epilepsy in humans. That said, there is a large volume of anecdotal evidence of its benefit. Studying the effects of marijuana on seizures in an appropriate and scientific environment is the optimal way to determine whether this currently illegal drug has any appropriate use in the treatment of epilepsy. In this perspective the approval by the FDA to start clinical studies on pediatric intractable epilepsies is a huge step forward.

References

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- 3-Cunha JM et al. Chronic administration of cannabidiol to healthy volunteers and epileptic patients. *Pharmacology*. 1980; 21(3): 175-85.