

1-2020

The Financial and Psychosocial Impact of Medicinal Cannabis

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Recommended Citation

Ahmed, Chris; Lee, Andrew; Campbell, Amanda; Garber, MSW, LCSW, Gregory; Palmisiano, MD, Neil D.; and Worster, MD, Brooke, "The Financial and Psychosocial Impact of Medicinal Cannabis" (2020). *Phase 1*. Paper 103.

https://jdc.jefferson.edu/si_ctr_2022_phase1/103

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The Financial and Psychosocial Impact of Medicinal Cannabis

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Introduction: Therapeutic utilization of medicinal cannabis for symptom management in oncology patients is a burgeoning area of research focus. We hypothesize that medicinal cannabis use can result in subjective improvements in quality of life (QOL) metrics for cancer patients.

Methods: Adult palliative care patients at a medical oncology clinic are consented to the study after being certified to access medicinal cannabis. After three months, subjective changes in QOL, including well-being, financial burden, pain, chemotherapy induced nausea and vomiting (CINV), and other categories are recorded via telephone interview. Responses are documented with a numerical Likert scale (from 1-5, with a score of 1 = greatly decreased satisfaction, and 5 = greatly increased satisfaction; a score of 3 is no change from baseline). Scores >3.5 were deemed meaningful in terms of improvement.

Results: An aggregate of 35 patient scores showed meaningful increases in subjective satisfaction across most metrics. Satisfaction with CINV symptoms showed the most marked improvement, with an average score of 3.63. While pain scores were similar at 3.53, more general QOL metrics were lower, at 3.46. Most patients did not find the cost to be burdensome, with an average score of 3.03.

Discussion: The initial 35 interviews of our desired n of 120 suggest that medicinal cannabis may provide analgesic, antiemetic, and anxiolytic benefits for cancer patients. We anticipate that additional interviews will follow this pattern. If so, our study could bolster the evidence that therapeutic use of medicinal cannabis may be helpful for patients undergoing cancer treatment.