

Drug Trends Related to Marijuana

Legalization: Great Idea or Worst Idea
Ever?

Sheila Weix MSN, RN, CARN

Background and Housekeeping

- Who am I?
 - In addiction practice since the mid-1980s
 - Registered Nurse, Certified Addictions Registered Nurse (CARN)
 - Detoxification, inpatient, outpatient, residential and acute care consultation
- Expectations:
 - If you have a question, please ask.
 - If you disagree, let's talk about it...I'm always willing to learn

Objectives

- Understand trends in the use of marijuana regionally, statewide and nationally
- Appreciate the challenges faced by SUD treatment providers related to marijuana use
- Critically assess claims regarding the use of marijuana for medicinal and recreational purposes

What are current trends?

- 22.2 million Americans have used it in the last month (2015 NSDUH – NIH)
 - 12% vs 56% using alcohol
 - WI 13%
(<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p4/p45718-16.pdf>)
- Decreased perception of risk
- Monitoring the Future Survey - 2016
 - 8th graders – 9.4% in past year; 5.4% in past month
 - 10th graders – 23.9% in past year; 14% in past month
 - 12th graders – 35.6% in past year; 22.5% in past month

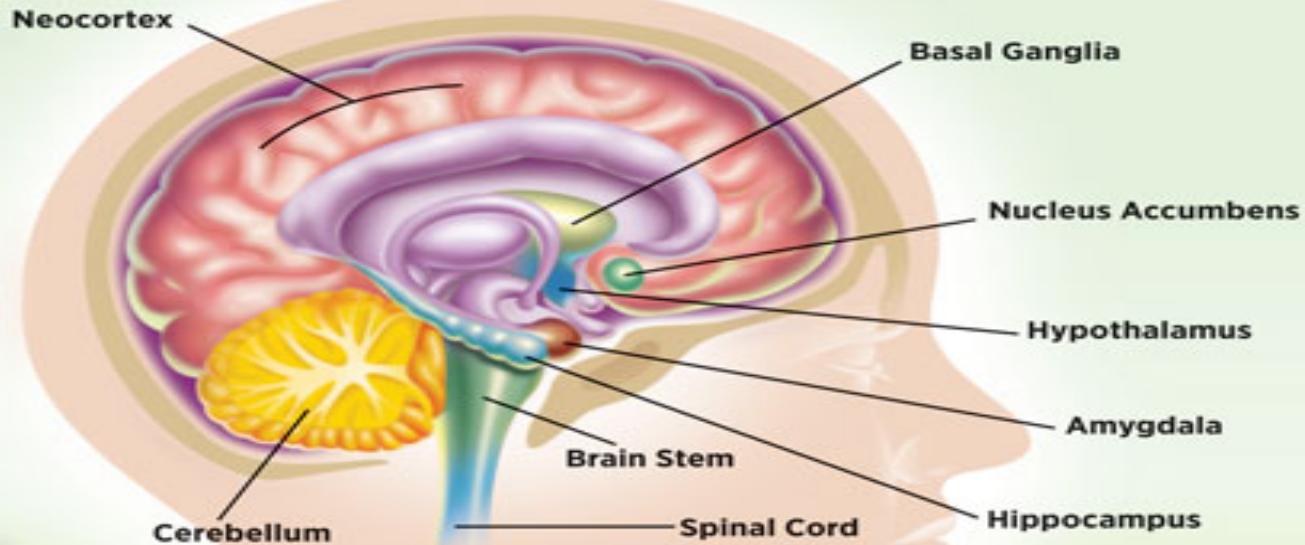
Changes

- Legalization
 - Michigan – legal for recreation and medical
 - Minnesota – legal for medical
 - Illinois – 1/1/2020 legal sale begins
- Was: Alcohol, tobacco, pain pills, street (or illicit) drugs
- Now: All of above plus, do you use any form of marijuana?
 - Medicinal
 - Recreation

THC and the Brain:

<http://headsup.scholastic.com/students/the-science-of-marijuana>

How does THC affect behavior? *It depends on where the CB receptors are in the brain.*



Brain Structure	Regulates	THC Effect on User
Amygdala	emotions, fear, anxiety	panic/paranoia
Basal Ganglia	planning/starting a movement	slowed reaction time
Brain Stem	information between brain and spinal column	antinausea effects
Cerebellum	motor coordination, balance	impaired coordination
Hippocampus	learning new information	impaired memory
Hypothalamus	eating, sexual behavior	increased appetite
Neocortex	complex thinking, feeling, and movement	altered thinking, judgment, and sensation
Nucleus Accumbens	motivation and reward	euphoria (feeling good)
Spinal Cord	transmission of information between body and brain	altered pain sensitivity

The brain structures illustrated above all contain high numbers of CB receptors

Differing Positions

- MJ treats pain, seizures, nausea, anxiety
- The only problem is the legal status
- MJ should be readily available to adults for recreational use because many people have used it for years without problems
- MJ is a gateway drug that will only lead to “harder drugs”
- Legalizing MJ will result in increased crime and homelessness
- We need to maintain our “war on drugs” not legalize something now

What do we know based on evidence?

Position

- MJ is a gateway drug that will only lead to “harder drugs”
- RECOMMENDATION:
More research
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/marijuana-gateway-drug>

Evidence

- MJ associated with increased Alcohol UD after 3 yrs
- Associated with Nicotine UD
- Early exposure increased sensitization
- Majority of MJ users do NOT go on to harder drugs
- People vulnerable to SUD take available substances

What do we know?

Position

- Legalizing MJ will result in increased crime and homelessness
- RECOMMENDATION:
More research

<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/legal-cannabis-colorado/>

Evidence

- Homelessness in Colorado after legalization due to lack of affordable housing, increasing rent and wages not increasing
- Car crashes-good testing not available
- MJ in schools: actual decrease in reported use since legalization (11.16 to 9.08)

What do we know?

Position

- We need to maintain our “war on drugs” not legalize something now

<https://www.aclu.org/blog/smart-justice/sentencing-reform/what-if-wisconsin-arrested-half-many-people-marijuana>

Evidence

- Cost of enforcing MJ laws for simple possession may not have the intended outcome
- Police time & resources
- Court & jail time, resources, cost
- Implications for those who are charged

What do we know?

Position

- MJ treats pain, seizures, nausea, anxiety

RECOMMENDATION:
Research!!

<https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/news/20180420/can-marijuana-be-the-answer-for-pain>

Evidence

- ...evidence on marijuana and pain is strongest for helping nerve pain (neuropathy) and cancer-related pain. The committee also concluded that certain oral cannabinoids improved muscle spasms in patients with multiple sclerosis.

What do we know?

Position

- The only problem is the legal status

RECOMMENDATION:
Clear the way for
research!

Evidence

- There are MULTIPLE unanswered questions due to the lack of research. Federal law prevents current research due to listing of MJ as Schedule I (heroin, LSD)

What do we know?

Position

- MJ should be readily available to adults for recreational use because many people have used it for years without problems

Evidence

- Not untrue, but does have risks
 - Brain changes
 - Mental health issues
 - Substance use disorder
 - Medical issues

RECOMMENDATION:
Research!!!

Pregnancy and Marijuana

- Possible low-birth weight association
- Chemicals in/on the substance
- Brain development in the baby
- Impact on the mother
- Breast-feeding: potential pass through
- CDC Recommendation: Do not use marijuana in any form if planning on pregnancy, pregnant or breast-feeding

Answer to the question?

33 states allow medical marijuana

13 states have decriminalized marijuana

10 states allow recreational marijuana



It's time for solid research to sort out fact from position.

What we do know:

- Drugs are not good for developing brains (prior to age 25 and during pregnancy)
- Any substance that affects reaction time, coordination should not be used if one will be driving (mj, alcohol, etc.)
- People have varying levels of vulnerability to any substance. Some people should NOT use mj.
- Moving forward, protect children and plan for money to assist with consequences

Challenges in Treatment

- If only approach being used is “it’s illegal” there is limited utility
- Stepped approach unless marijuana is part of acute presentation
 - Delirium/psychosis
 - Cannabinoid Hyperemesis Syndrome
- Motivational work
- Harm reduction
- Continued movement forward with Recovery

Thoughts and Questions?

Contact: Sheila Weix MSN, RN, CARN
Director of Substance Abuse Services
Family Health Center – MCHS
Weix.Sheila@marshfieldclinic.org