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## Comparing the Effectiveness of Cannabis Use and Opioid Use in Palliative Care Patients

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# Comparing the Effectiveness of Cannabis Use and Opioid Use in Palliative Care Patients

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## Introduction

Palliative care is defined as an approach that focuses on improving the quality of care of seriously ill people and their families. The use of opioids are abundant in palliative care and often come with unwanted side effects that can lead to sentinel events leading to significant patient harm.

- In palliative care, opioids, along with other controlled drugs, are the most used. However, they carry several side effects.
- Marijuana is a newer drug being used in palliative care that can help reduce pain, and may have a fewer number of side effects.
- Palliative care is used in several populations, including older adults (people above the age of 65). Older adults who are receiving palliative care are the focus of this research.

## Problem

The objective of this study was to research and compare the effectiveness and client satisfaction of opioids in comparison to using marijuana for pain relief and reducing unwanted side effects.

**PICO Question:** Are patients older than 65 that are receiving palliative care who use marijuana for pain management compared with those who use opioids for pain management more satisfied with their pain level?



## Results

- In a study with 101 people, including 64% of people who were over the age of 50, 96% of participants using medical cannabis said that the drug was important for their pain management, reporting minimal side effects (Zarrabi et. al., 2020)
- Medical cannabis has been proven to be successful in treating chronic pain, as well as an antiemetic and a treatment for anxiety and poor appetite (Kogan & Sexton, 2020).
- Cannabis is an effective alternative form of support for patients, rather than palliative or hospice care. Cannabis accessibility causes a decreased hospice enrollment (Croker et. al., 2022).
- The use of cannabis to address multiple complaints has decreased the need for drug cocktails in older adults (Kogan & Sexton, 2020).
- Opioids result in an increased number of falls, fall injuries and fractures among older adults, proving that alternative pain management is needed (Yoshikawa et. al., 2020).
- Does were often too high for older adults (65 years plus). 62% of falls that occurred in a particular study involved opioids that were administered 24 hours before the fall (Blachman et. al., 2017).
- With the increase in older adults occurring in the United States, chronic pain is a concern that needs to be addressed and it is important for pain education to include different options (Schofield, 2018).

## Methods

- Google Scholar, Nursing Reference Center, and CINAHL were the databases used to research and obtain information on this topic.
- Inclusion criteria included “marijuana”, “opioids”, “palliative care”, “pain management”
- All research articles had been published between 2017-2023. Excluding forms of other alternative medicine and non-opioid methods of pain relief



## Conclusions

- Marijuana is an effective alternative to opioids in palliative care for older adults above the age of 65 years old.
- Opioids cause unnecessary, harmful side effects, particularly falls, injuries and respiratory depression.
- Marijuana is widely effective in terms of pain reduction, and is relatively safe, with the main short-term side effect being drowsiness. While there are several long-term side effects to marijuana use, such as cardiac disease and peripheral vascular disease, this is not necessarily a concern with palliative care in older adults (Mavhan et. al., 2017).
- Due to the growing older adult population in America, marijuana should be more widely used as an alternative to opioids in palliative care to increase pain control and quality of life.

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