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Medical cannabis may help treat mental health problems and opioid addiction

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Using marijuana could help some alcoholics and people addicted to opioids kick their habits, a UBC study has found.

"Research suggests that people may be using cannabis as an exit drug to reduce the use of substances that are potentially more harmful, such as opioid pain medication," says the study's lead investigator Zach Walsh, an associate professor of psychology at UBC's Okanagan campus.

This comprehensive systematic review of research on the medical cannabis use and mental health also found some evidence that cannabis may help with symptoms of depression, PTSD and social anxiety. However, the review concluded that cannabis use might not be recommended for conditions such as bipolar disorder and psychosis.

"In reviewing the limited evidence on medical cannabis, it appears that patients and others who have advocated for cannabis as a tool for harm reduction and mental health have some valid points," says Walsh.

Walsh and his team systematically reviewed all studies of medical cannabis and mental health, as well as reviews on non-medical cannabis use--making the review one of the most comprehensive reports to date on the effects of medical cannabis on mental health.

With legalization of marijuana possible as early as next year in Canada, its important to identify ways to help mental health professional move beyond stigma to better understand the risk and benefits of cannabis is increasingly important, adds Walsh.

"There is not currently a lot of clear guidance on how mental health professionals can best work with people who are using cannabis for medical purposes," says Walsh. "With the end of prohibition, telling people to simply stop using may no longer be as feasible an option. Knowing how to consider cannabis in the treatment equation will become a necessity."

Source:

University of British Columbia Okanagan campus
