

Perceptions and Attitudes towards Medicinal Cannabis: A Systematic Literature Review

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Introduction: The aim of this review is to identify, summarise and synthesise available research addressing the perceptions and attitudes of healthcare professionals and patients towards medicinal cannabis.

Method: A systematic literature search of three databases (MEDLINE, Scopus, EMBASE) was conducted From 1991 to November 2018. The selection criteria included quantitative and qualitative research studies, in English, that explored perceptions and attitudes. Studies were critically appraised and thematic analysis was used to synthesise their findings.

Key Finding: Eighty-three relevant publications were found. Fifty-five were literature reviews and 28 were commentaries, viewpoints and reviews with the majority (53/83) published in USA. Six studies were found from Australia. The research revealed a diverse array of attitudes, ranging from those strongly in favour of medicinal cannabis to others that were sceptical of its efficacy and doubtful that introduction of cannabis will not instigate abuse. Three themes were identified as influencing the healthcare professionals and patients' attitudes towards medicinal cannabis: 1) stigma, 2) perceptions of safety and efficacy, 3) sources of evidence and information.

Discussion: Healthcare professionals and patients have some reservations regarding use of medicinal cannabis due to stigma. Understandings of safety and efficacy often appear to be influenced by anecdotes and/or personal experiences. Information sources have a major impact on the attitude and stance of patients and healthcare professionals. However, a lack of scientific evidence and need for education has been highlighted by many healthcare professionals.

Implications for Policy: In NSW, AUD\$40 Million has been invested to research medicinal cannabis and an Information Bulletin (IB2016_045) on Cannabinoid published. Addressing concerns, ensures practicality for policy. Historically cannabis with its enduring criminalization leads to broader social and cultural forces that influence attitudes and implementation of policy for its therapeutic applications to be effective.

Conclusion: A range of barriers were identified. It is not yet clear how healthcare professionals and patients source information on medicinal cannabis.

Keywords: medical cannabis, marijuana, dronabinol, delta-9 THC, marinol, cannabinoid, levonantradol, cesamet, nabilone, endocannabinoid, analgesics, muscle spasticity, chronic pain, multiple sclerosis, perceptions, confidence, opinion, attitude, therapeutic

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