

Setting up Medical Cannabis Vaporising Research in AOD Clinics in Australia – Issues and Key Learnings

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Background: Given the recent changes to medical cannabis legislation in Australia, interest has grown in conducting research on the substance's effects beyond its therapeutic use. Here we report on the procedure of setting up the first trials with medical cannabis in the research units of two New South Wales Drug and Alcohol Service sites (The Langton Centre and Royal Prince Alfred Hospital), and the unique challenges that came up in this particular setting.

Description of model of care/intervention: Both trials were fully randomized placebo-controlled trials with healthy volunteers, who were occasional users of cannabis. The study endpoints were driving performance in Trial A, and measures of memory and cognition in Trial B. In Trial A, the study drug (Tilray T100: 11% THC, <1% CBD; Tilray T200: 11% THC, 11% CBD) and placebo were administered to participants via a Mighty Medic vaporiser. In Trial B, the study drug (Bedrobinol: 13.5% THC, <1% CBD) and placebo were administered via a Volcano vaporiser.

Effectiveness: We describe the process of setting up these trials and report on several issues that were raised in terms of governance, ethics, and the study site. Specifically, site concerns raised related pharmacy in terms of licensing and storage, training of staff, administrative issues, staff and consumer perceptions regarding vaping in a drug and alcohol service setting, and handling of intoxicated participants in a research capacity.

Conclusion and next steps: Although a challenging task, setting up cannabis vaporising trials in this setting was a worthwhile experience, as processes are now in place for future studies to be run. Future directions will be discussed.

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