Over the past several years, cannabis (otherwise known as marijuana) has gained prominence, both in the public eye and in health care. And though it’s only been since 2013 that federal regulations have allowed Canadians with medical documentation to access herbal cannabis from licensed producers (LPs), cannabis has in fact been used for centuries as a medicine to treat many health conditions.

Currently, there is growing evidence that cannabis may help cancer patients manage the nausea, vomiting and neuropathic pain (i.e. pins and needles) caused by chemotherapy and radiation. Cannabis may also help improve some patients’ appetites during treatment.

As medical cannabis continues to gain exposure, interest has increased around re-exploring the plant’s other health benefits, including the possible role of cannabis as a cancer treatment, especially for malignant brain tumours. There has been one study in Spain that explored what happens when cannabis is injected into the tumour of individuals with glioblastoma multiforme (GBM). The tumours were seen to shrink in this small study. A clinical trial is underway in the UK that examines the effect of using cannabis alongside the standard-of-care temozolomide chemotherapy for GBM. Further research is needed to determine whether cannabis is an effective and safe treatment for brain tumours.

Like any medical treatment, it’s important to remember that cannabis can come with side effects that must be balanced against its potential benefits. The psychoactive effect or “high” often associated with cannabis may cause paranoia, panic, mania or hallucinations. There is higher risk for those with mental health issues, especially with schizophrenia. In addition, cannabis can cause physical side effects, including dry mouth, increased appetite, heart and blood pressure problems, nausea and vomiting, headaches, and dry/red eyes.

To learn more about whether cannabis is right for you, speak to your physician or another member of your health care team about the benefits and risks associated with medical cannabis.

Please visit BrainTumour.ca to learn more about medical cannabis and Health Canada’s Licensed Producers
Additional support, information and education offered by Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada:

Adult, Pediatric and Non-Malignant Brain Tumour Handbooks available in English and French.

“A Friend in Hope” children’s storybook available in English and French.

20+ Adult Support Groups across Canada (in-person and virtual)

Toll-free information and support line

BrainWAVE Pediatric Support Program

Print BrainStorm Newsletter
Email Newsletters:
- E-BrainStorm
- Peace of Mind

“Grey Matters” Blog

All patient resources are available free-of-charge in Canada. Call 1-800-265-5106 or visit www.BrainTumour.ca for additional details and information.

Authors:

Since 2007, Dr. Lynda Balneaves has been the Principal Investigator of the Complementary Medicine Education and Outcomes (CAMEO) Research Program, which is one of the first knowledge translation and decision support programs focused on cancer and complementary therapies. In September 2014, Dr. Balneaves joined the University of Toronto to become the inaugural Director of the Centre for Integrative Medicine. She held the Kwok Yuen and Betty Ho Chair in Integrative Medicine and was a Scientist II in Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care (POPC) at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. In August 2016, Dr. Balneaves joined the University of Manitoba’s Rady Faculty of Health Sciences as an Associate Professor in the College of Nursing. Dr. Balneaves is on the board of the International Society of Complementary Medicine Research (ISCMR) and is President-Elect of the Society for Integrative Medicine (SIO). Dr. Balneaves is interested in the use of complementary therapies in the context of cancer. Her specific research focus has been on the development and evaluation of knowledge translation and decision support interventions for individuals living with cancer and oncology health professionals. Dr. Balneaves has been active in health services research related to the use and access to medical marijuana in Canada.

Rielle Capler, MHA, PhD(c) has been working in the medical cannabis field in Canada for over 15 years. She worked with the first medical cannabis dispensary in Canada for 8 years, and has developed nationwide standards and a certification program for dispensaries with the Canadian Association of Medical Cannabis Dispensaries, which she co-founded in 2010. Rielle has been engaged in community-based cannabis research projects focused on patient access, responsible use and strain-symptom efficacy. She has developed education materials for patients, the public, and health care providers, and has provided consulting services to medical cannabis clinics and licensed producers. Rielle is currently a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia.