

Canadians trust medical judgment on use of medical cannabis

THE MAJORITY OF CANADIANS would trust medical professionals regarding the prescribing of medical cannabis, according to an Ipsos poll.

The survey included a sample of 2,002 Canadians aged 18 years or older who were interviewed online via Ipsos's I-Say panel between Dec. 7 and 10, 2018. The poll is accurate to within 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, according to Ipsos. The poll was commissioned by Tetra Bio-Pharma.

Among the findings, nearly

two-thirds of the respondents (65%) said they were very or somewhat willing to accept a pharmaceutical medication containing cannabis if it was prescribed by their doctor, approved by Health Canada, and covered by insurance. If the medications would not be covered by insurance and the respondent had to pay out of pocket, the rate of willingness to use these treatments dropped to 38%.

Additionally, the survey revealed that Canadians were confident that cannabis has therapeutic benefits, with four-fifths (82%) strongly or somewhat agreeing that cannabis can reduce pain and other symptoms. More than two-thirds (68%) were very or somewhat willing to take cannabis to manage chronic pain, insomnia,

anxiety, or depression. That number rose to 84% among respondents who experience three or more conditions that have been linked to treatment with cannabis-related medications.

The value of medical expertise in risk management was also recognized, with 88% of respondents saying they believe there is some degree of risk in using cannabis for health conditions without first consulting a physician.

NHL alumni support sports concussion initiative

THE NHL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (NHLAA) has an-

nounced they are partnering with Canopy Growth to launch a research initiative into cannabis compounds as a treatment protocol for diseases connected to concussions in former NHL players (Global News Toronto, Mar. 2, 2019). Research will be led by NEEKA Healthcare Canada's neurosurgeon, Dr. Amin Kassam.

"We have seen the debilitating effects of chronic repeated head injuries on the lives of patients and their families. Our team is excited . . . to demonstrate the immense and unexplored opportunity in cannabis-based remedies," said Dr. Kassam.

The study will begin this summer and will involve approximately 100 former NHL players participating in a double-blind study for one year. Specifically, researchers will explore if cannabidiol combined with other proven treatments will improve the cognitive ability of trial participants who are experiencing the effects of concussions.

According to Glenn Healy, executive director of the NHLAA, "this is hope and this is help for players. We thank the members of the NHLAA whose willingness to join this unique research partnership speak to the need for alternative medical treatments to treat the long-term and often devastating effects of concussions."

Research shows that between 1.6 million to 3.8 million athletes experience sports-related concussions each year, and an estimated

Two Ontario academic institutions granted licenses to cultivate cannabis

FOLLOWING THE LEGALIZATION of cannabis for recreational use in Canada in Oct. 2018, there has been an increased recognition that additional scientific and evidence-based research on the effects and benefits of cannabis is required. To facilitate this research, Health Canada has granted eight Canadian academic institutions a license to cultivate cannabis. The University of Guelph (U of G) in Guelph, Ont. and Niagara College in Welland, Ont., are two of the academic institutions that have received licenses.

At U of G, Max Jones, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Department of Agriculture and his team are researching the genetics and optimal growing conditions for cannabis as well as working on the creation of a gene bank to be used by both researchers and growers by studying cannabis tissue cultures.

At Niagara College, an educational program has been implemented for students to earn a Commercial Cannabis Production Graduate Certificate. According to Al Unwin, Associate Dean of Environment and Horticulture at Niagara College, Niagara-on-the-Lake campus, the two-semester program focuses on three areas: understanding plant science, how to grow and harvest marijuana, and regulatory requirements and the business side of the industry. Both institutions are required to destroy all cultivated cannabis once research has been completed.

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10 to 15% of these athletes develop post-concussion symptoms that affect their ability to function. Concussion and post-concussion related illness can include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and dementia.

Cannabis used to treat endometriosis?

RESEARCHERS IN ISRAEL have begun pre-clinical studies to test the effects of medical cannabis on the treatment of endometriosis. Doctors are studying which compounds or combination of cannabis compounds could potentially treat the disorder.

Roughly 176 million women worldwide experience the effects of endometriosis. It is estimated that 1 in 10 women between the ages of 15 to 49 years will be affected by symptoms of endometriosis during their lifetime.

Anecdotal evidence has shown that women who smoke cannabis find relief from their pain, according to Dr. Sari Sagiv, a vice-president of research and development at Gynica, the company conducting the research.

Researchers have already tested a number of cannabis compounds on endometriosis cells in vitro to gauge the reaction to the compounds.

The aim is to begin clinical trials in the third quarter of 2019.

Toronto calls for ban on sale of cannabis edibles

TORONTO'S BOARD OF HEALTH has approved a recommendation calling on the federal government to ban certain cannabis edibles that may be attractive to children, such as cannabis-infused candies,

lollipops, and gummy bears (CTV News Toronto, Feb. 25, 2019). The recommendation was made by Toronto's medical officer of health, Dr. Eileen de Villa.

"We know there are specific risks that are there for young people should they get exposed to cannabis products. Their brains are still developing and we know that early exposure to cannabis, exposure to cannabis before 25 years of age, is actually

associated with particular harms to the developing brain," said Dr. de Villa.

Although the board of health supports the legalization of cannabis, Dr. de Villa and her colleagues believe that strict regulations are needed to reduce the potential negative effects of cannabis exposure in children. The board also recommends creating and improving devices for monitoring cannabis consumption rates as well as the full range of its potential effects on health.

"We have actually quite a bit of support in respect of our stance and today was no exception to that," said Dr. de Villa.

"The board did approve the report as I put forward before them and they were quite supportive of the notion that what we need to do is to legalize cannabis but to do so in a method that actually minimizes the harms associated with the drug."

Cannabis edibles are not currently legal in Canada. However, these products are expected to be included in the Cannabis Act when it is amended, which is scheduled to occur in October 2019.

—Mark McElwain,
CJMC Correspondent

Social media campaign urges Canadian officials to end medical cannabis tax

THE MEDICAL CANNABIS ADVOCACY GROUP Canadians for Fair Access to Medical Marijuana (CFAMM) is calling for the Canadian government to cease taxation on medical cannabis (Benefits Canada, Feb. 11, 2019).

The Canadian government has placed an excise tax on cannabis, similar to taxes on tobacco and alcohol, which are classified based on the negative effect the substances pose toward public health. In addition to sales tax, this excise tax can cause the total cost of the sale of cannabis to increase by up to 25%, which can put the price out of reach for patients who are on a fixed income. The group argues that medical cannabis is beneficial to some patients and should be treated the same way as other untaxed medications.

In a press release, the president of CFAMM, Gerald Major, estimated the number of Canadians who require medical cannabis at nearly half a million people. These include patients who use cannabis to treat conditions ranging from chronic pain to mental health issues. "The government is making it incredibly difficult for patients to manage the cost of their treatment and many tell us they can't afford their physician-recommended dose," said Major.

As part of their campaign to eliminate the excise duty, the CFAMM has collected 27,000 emails from medical marijuana patients and supporters, and the list has been sent to elected officials. They are using the hashtag #DontTaxMedicine to spread their message via social media.

■ Please turn to page 32 for a listing of clinical trials that are investigating the effects of cannabinoids on conditions such as Tourette's syndrome and chronic posttraumatic stress disorder