

Hand Surgery Patient Perspectives on Medical Cannabis: A Survey of Over 600 Patients

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Introduction

- Pain management remains a major challenge in orthopaedics, and especially in hand surgery
- Surgeons have used multiple strategies to combat this challenge, including multimodal pain regimens and preoperative opioid counseling
- Recently, studies have proposed that Medical Cannabis (MC) could be an additional treatment option for chronic pain, by subjectively improving symptoms, decreasing opioid usage, and improving quality of life
- MC is now legal in 36 states and the District of Columbia for a variety of qualifying medical conditions, and recreational cannabis (RC) is now legal in 15 states
- However, cannabis is still currently listed by the Drug Enforcement Agency as a Schedule I drug, which has prevented medical researchers from performing high quality clinical trials
- The purpose of this study is to assess current orthopaedic hand and upper extremity surgery patient perspectives of MC, and to investigate factors that may represent barriers to patient utilization of MC

Materials and Methods

- Anonymous cross sectional survey study
- From October 2020 to January 2021, all patients over 18 years of age presenting for an office visit with one of three board certified, fellowship trained orthopaedic hand and upper extremity surgeons in New Jersey and Pennsylvania were asked to participate
- MC is legal in both states that were investigated, with New Jersey legalizing MC in 2010 and Pennsylvania in 2016
- Patients completed a novel survey that was created by the investigators regarding patient opinions of MC
- All survey responses were collected and stored electronically via SurveyMonkey

Results

- 679 unique hand and upper extremity surgery patients participated
- 68 patients (10.0%) currently used MC
- Of the 90.0% of patients not currently using MC, most (80.9%) would consider using MC for a chronic pain or orthopaedic condition
- Most (91.8%) were aware of the legality of MC in their state, and most (88.1%) believed MC should be legal throughout the United States

Gender	N	%
Male	293	43.2%
Female	386	56.8%
Age		
18-34	121	17.8%
35-49	157	23.1%
50-64	240	35.3%
65+	161	23.7%
Education		
High School	155	22.8%
College	296	43.6%
Graduate School	161	23.7%
Professional school	63	9.3%
None of the above	4	0.6%

Results (cont.)

- Cost was the most commonly selected potential barrier to using MC at 49.0% (Figure 1)
- 70.5% of patients believed the cost of MC to be either expensive or not affordable
- Most patients agreed that MC is safe for use with common orthopaedic conditions (75.2%, Figure 2A) and is safer than using prescription opioids (77.1%, Figure 2B)
- The most commonly selected orthopaedic conditions that patients would consider using MC for included arthritis (57%) and back pain (55%) (Figure 3)

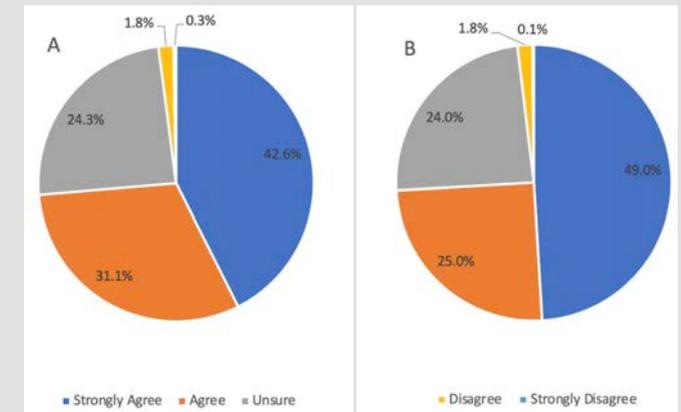


Figure 2: Patient opinion that medical cannabis is (A) safe for use for common orthopedics conditions, and (B) safer than prescription opioids.

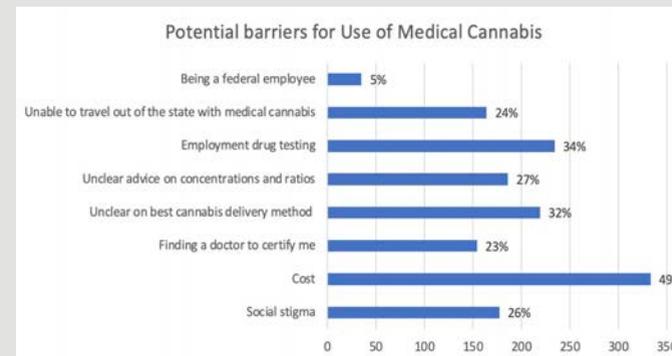


Figure 1. Potential Barriers for Medical Cannabis use.

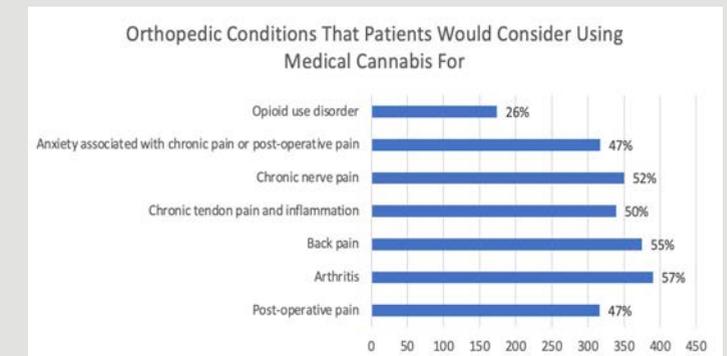


Figure 3. Orthopedic conditions that patients would consider using medical cannabis for.

Conclusion

- The findings of this study appear to reflect nationwide trends in the increasing acceptance of both medical and recreational cannabis
- The majority of hand and upper extremity surgery patients would consider using MC for chronic pain or other orthopaedic conditions if indicated
- General public knowledge, cost, and social stigma remain barriers for orthopaedic hand surgery patient utilization of MC