Marijuana May Safely Treat Some Mental Illnesses

November 23, 2016

Some people use cannabis as part of their treatment regimen for certain illnesses. Now findings show that the drug's therapeutic repertoire might expand to include treatment for depression, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and, perhaps, even opioid addiction, according to a recent report published in the journal Clinical Psychology Review, ScienceDaily reports.

For the study, researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) reviewed 31 studies relating to the use of cannabis as mental health therapy as well as 29 articles about marijuana and mental health that didn't focus on the drug as a medical therapy.

The scientists said that with the legalization of marijuana in Canada possible as early as next year, it's key for doctors to better understand the risks and benefits of prescribing cannabis for people living with mental illness.

This assessment concluded that marijuana's potential to treat some mental disorders wasn't linked to an increased risk of harm to oneself or others. In addition, researchers noted that pot could be hugely beneficial to some alcoholics and people addicted to opioid drugs trying to kick their habits.

But scientists cautioned that the review also uncovered evidence that treating individuals with mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder or psychosis with cannabis wasn't recommended.

"There is currently not a lot of clear guidance on how mental health professionals can best work with people who are using cannabis for medical purposes," said Zach Walsh, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at UBC and lead researcher of the study. "With the end of prohibition, telling people to simply stop using may no longer be as feasible an option, so knowing how to consider cannabis in the treatment equation will become a necessity."

To date, the evaluation is one of the most comprehensive on the topic of marijuana and mental illness. But before marijuana can become a powerful tool for treating disorders of the mind and for harm reduction, much more research is needed.

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