

CHRD 2024: Abstract Submission Form

Presenter Name

Parth Saul

Presenter Status

Undergraduate Students

Role in the project

Perform Experiments

Analyze Data

Write Abstract

Research Category

Community Health / Policy

Title

Parental Experiences of Cannabis Use for Their Children with Cancer: A Canadian Perspective

Background

Despite improvement in survival rates in pediatric oncology, outcomes for relapsed or refractory cancers remain poor, with treatments often causing significant side effects. In search of symptom relief and alternative therapies, many parents are turning to medical cannabis.

Objective

This qualitative study explores the experiences and perceptions of parents using cannabis for their children with cancer.

Methods

The parents living in Canada who use or have used cannabis for their children with cancer for medical purposes participated in one-to-one virtual semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited through pediatric oncology clinics, advocacy networks, and social media. Data were analyzed using content analysis by two independent reviewers to identify common themes.

Results

The study included 13 parents (11 females, 2 males) of children with a median age of 9 years (4–17 years). The most common cancer diagnoses among the children were brain tumors (62%) and acute lymphoblastic leukemia (15%). Several key themes emerged from the data: (1) parental challenges, including limited access to information on the benefits, side effects, dosage, and drug interactions of cannabis, out-of-pocket costs, difficulty in accessing cannabis, moral, legal, and ethical dilemmas, and societal perceptions of cannabis use; (2) observed improvements in symptom management, particularly for nausea, vomiting, pain, anorexia, and weight loss; (3) the need for open, non-judgmental communication from healthcare providers; (4) the importance of enhancing knowledge and education about medical cannabis among healthcare professionals; and (5) the necessity for further research on cannabis use in pediatric oncology.

Conclusion

Parents view cannabis as beneficial for symptom management in their children but face significant challenges in its use. There is an urgent need for research on cannabis safety, efficacy, and appropriate dosing for pediatric oncology indications. Equally important is fostering non-judgmental communication between healthcare providers and families to support informed, safe usage.

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