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Original Investigation | Health Care Policy and Law

May 2018

Association of Medical and Adult-Use Marijuana Laws With Opioid Prescribing for Medicaid Enrollees

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JAMA Intern Med. 2018;178(5):673-679. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2018.1007



Key Points

Question Are medical and adult-use marijuana laws passed after 2010 associated with lower rates of opioid prescribing for Medicaid enrollees?

Findings In this population-based, cross-sectional study using the all-capture Medicaid prescription data for 2011 to 2016, medical marijuana laws and adult-use marijuana laws were associated with lower opioid prescribing rates (5.88% and 6.38% lower, respectively).

Meaning Medical and adult-use marijuana laws have the potential to lower opioid prescribing for Medicaid enrollees, a high-risk population for chronic pain, opioid use disorder, and opioid overdose, and marijuana liberalization may serve as a component of a comprehensive package to tackle the opioid epidemic.

Abstract

April 5, 2018

Should marijuana be co-prescribed with opioids, when the latter are needed for pain?

DAVID KELLER, M.D., M.S. | Retired internal medicine physician.

These results imply that the liberalized prescribing of marijuana may result in decreased use of opioids, and hence, fewer subsequent opioid-related overdose events.

Marijuana has demonstrated some mild analgesic effects, when compared with placebo in clinical studies, but has not been proven to relieve pain as effectively as opioids.

Dangerous effects of opioid abuse, including fatal respiratory depression, result when patients exceed safe dosages in an attempt to get high, or experience the opioid "rush".

Could this study's results be explained by the possibility that abuse-prone patients are satisfied with the less-dangerous marijuana "high", and therefore ...

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