

Paper Presentations continued

2:00 pm - 2:15 pm

Marijuana Use is Associated with Worse Outcomes in Symptom Severity and Violent Behavior in Patients with PTSD

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Objective: An increasing number of states have approved Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a qualifying condition for medical marijuana, though little evidence exists evaluating the effect of marijuana use in PTSD. We examined the association between marijuana use and PTSD symptom severity in a longitudinal, observational study.

Method: Veterans with PTSD (N=2276) were admitted to specialized VA treatment programs with assessments conducted at intake and four months after discharge. Subjects were classified into four groups according to marijuana use: those with no use at admission or after discharge (“Never used”); those who used at admission but not after discharge (“Stoppers”); those who used at admission and after discharge (“Continuing Users”); and those using after discharge but not at admission (“Starters”). Analysis of variance compared baseline characteristics and identified relevant covariates. Analysis of covariance then compared groups on follow-up measures of PTSD symptoms, drug and alcohol use, violent behavior, and employment.

Results: After adjusting for relevant baseline covariates, marijuana use was significantly associated with worse outcomes in PTSD symptom severity, violent behavior, and measures of alcohol and drug use. Stoppers and never users had the lowest levels of PTSD symptoms at follow up ($p < 0.0001$). Starters had the highest levels of violent behavior ($p < 0.0001$).

Conclusions: In this observational study, initiating marijuana use after treatment was associated with worse PTSD symptoms, more violent behavior and alcohol use. Marijuana may actually worsen PTSD symptoms or nullify the benefits of specialized, intensive treatment. Cessation or prevention of use may be an important goal of treatment.

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