

Bridging the Gap: Exploring the Patient Perspective and Breaking Barriers to Access

Panel Discussion with people with lived experience

Moderated by: Dr. Azhar Rana

During a heartfelt and impactful panel discussion, three medical cannabis users, along with their caregivers, shared their expectations and experiences accessing medical cannabis for pain, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and pediatric epilepsy. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they reported common experiences of exhaustion from multiple failed treatments, encountering resistance and stigma within the healthcare system, and needing to advocate strongly for their own care.

One patient with fibromyalgia and arthritis described frustration with being repeatedly referred to pain clinics, only to be declined due to the non-specific nature of her pain. While she continues to experience daily discomfort, she reported that medical cannabis allows her to better manage her symptoms by providing a distraction from the pain, improving her focus, and enhancing her mobility.

The mother of a then-two-year-old daughter with intractable epilepsy described the immense relief she felt when their neurologist supported medical cannabis as a treatment option. She reported immediate improvements, including her daughter regaining the ability to walk just one day after starting CBD oil. Although the dosage has since been adjusted, including the addition of THC, their daughter has remained seizure-free for several years.

A veteran and his wife shared their frustration after years of unsuccessful treatments for chronic pain following his military service, during which he sustained a severe back injury. He became a wheelchair user and sometimes struggled with the loss of control of bodily fluids. He had nearly given up on recovery until a fellow veteran recommended medical cannabis. Since starting treatment, he reports an 85% improvement in both his symptoms and overall quality of life. His wife noticed immediate benefits, including a reduction in polypharmacy, and shared that she feels he has regained his dignity and autonomy. As a result, her caregiver burden has been significantly reduced, helping her avoid burnout. Today, they are once again able to enjoy life together as a family.

The panel highlighted the profound impact that medical cannabis can have on patients' quality of life, symptom management, and autonomy, particularly for those with conditions that are resistant to conventional treatments. From the patient perspective, common themes highlighted the frustration of not being heard by healthcare providers, the stigma they often encountered, and the need for clear, evidence-informed guidance on medical cannabis. At the same time, they emphasized the profound benefits that arise when providers listen and support patients' treatment choices. The discussion demonstrated the importance of advocating for patient-centered care, improving access to treatment, and integrating cannabis as a legitimate therapeutic option when appropriate. Clinicians are encouraged to consider medical cannabis as part of a holistic treatment plan and to actively support patients in navigating potential barriers to access.

References:

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