More Oncologists Are Discussing Medical Marijuana With Their Patients

Up to 80 percent of cancer docs have talked about cannabis with their patients, but knowledge gaps persist.

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A new study in the Journal of Clinical Oncology suggests that up to 80 percent of U.S. cancer docs have discussed medical marijuana with their patients, marking major changes in how oncologists view cannabis since California became the first state to legalize medical marijuana in 1996, according to a recent press release from the American Society of Clinical Oncology.

The study's authors say this is the first nationally representative survey to question cancer physicians about medical marijuana since the implementation of state medical marijuana laws. The study suggests that the subject of pharmaceutical cannabis is very prominent in cancer care today and that the majority of oncologists believe that it may have benefits for certain patients.

For the study, researchers mailed a survey to 400 practicing oncologists randomly selected from a national database of board-certified physicians. Of the 237 doctors who responded, more than half practiced in one of 30 U.S. states where medical marijuana is legal. The questionnaire asked about their discussions with patients, the recommendations they provided and their medical knowledge of cannabis and marijuana — especially with regard to the treatment of cancer-related symptoms such as pain, nausea and vomiting, depression, anxiety, poor appetite and insomnia.

Findings showed that 80 percent of oncologists had discussed medical marijuana with patients, and 78 percent reported that these conversations were most frequently initiated by patients and their families. Nearly half (46 percent) recommended medical marijuana use to a patient in the past year. And 67 percent said they thought it was at least as effective as standard treatments for poor appetite and weight loss. Less than 30 percent of oncologists said they felt knowledgeable enough about medical marijuana to make recommendations on it.

Researchers call for more clinical trials to address these gaps in knowledge regarding medical marijuana use for cancer patients.

To learn more about how medical marijuana can help treat cancer treatment symptoms, click here.

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