A Position Statement on Cannabinoids

The American Society of PeriAnesthesia Nurses (ASPAN) has the responsibility for defining the principles of safe, quality nursing practice in the perianesthesia setting. ASPAN, therefore, has the responsibility to define safe care for perianesthesia patients using cannabinoid products for medicinal or recreational purposes.

Background

Several states have legalized certain cannabinoid products not only for medicinal purposes, but also for personal and recreational use. Currently, the federal government maintains the position that the distribution and sale of recreational marijuana is illegal. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug. This classification is an indication that it has a high potential for abuse and the potential for physical dependence. In 2015, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that marijuana continues to be the most commonly used illicit drug.[1,2] Given the popularity of this plant, it remains highly likely that perianesthesia registered nurses will be providing care to occasional or habitual users whether for medicinal or recreational reasons.

Despite the popularity of cannabinoids, there continues to be a lack of substantial clinical evidence and expert opinion with regards to best practice for the prescribing and utilization of marijuana as a medication. Additionally, many of the products on the market are largely unregulated leading to variability in the composition of products available to the consumer. The term 'medicinal marijuana' describes the ingestion of parts of the marijuana plant for the purpose of alleviating symptoms of a variety of conditions or for mitigating particular illnesses. Most commonly, these products can be used for treating nausea, vomiting, anorexia, glaucoma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and pain.[3,4]

Position

It is, therefore, ASPAN's position that perianesthesia registered nurses seek ongoing and current knowledge of the legal, medical and social implications of cannabinoids and the perianesthesia patient. Perianesthesia registered nurses should continue to advance evidence-based clinical practice knowledge related to:

- Appropriate patient selection for medicinal marijuana and physical conditions for which the plant or its derivatives may be advantageous
- Health hazards associated with the use of marijuana which may include, but not be limited to[5]:
  — Potential for higher anesthesia dose requirements

— Potential for cardiovascular vasodilation with hypotension and bradycardia

— Reactive airways

— Potentiated effects of certain medications such as benzodiazepines and opioids

- The potential use of marijuana to mitigate the opioid crisis[6]

- Clinical research related to medicinal and recreational use of marijuana

- The ongoing stigma towards habitual marijuana users

- The impact of recreational marijuana use on individuals who are current members of the healthcare team[a]

Expected Outcomes

ASPAN promotes and encourages efforts to remain current with professional and societal changes that impact the health of communities and perianesthesia patients.

Perianesthesia registered nurses will advocate for additional research regarding the implications of marijuana for both medical and recreational purposes. Perianesthesia registered nurses will collaborate with interprofessional colleagues to define education needs regarding marijuana for both patients and members of the healthcare team.

ASPAN, as the voice of perianesthesia registered nursing, will share this position statement with regulatory agencies and other related professional organizations when appropriate.

Approval of Statement

This statement was reviewed by the ASPAN Board of Directors on April 28, 2018, in Anaheim, California, and approved by a vote of the ASPAN Representative Assembly on April 29, 2018, in Anaheim, California.

This position statement was updated and revised at the October 2019 meeting of the Standards and Guidelines Strategic Work Team in Dallas, Texas.

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ADDITIONAL READING

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