

Study Finds Medical Marijuana Treatment Reduces Use of Opioids

By: Caroline Cahill

On March 22, 2016, the University of Michigan **announced** that a recent **study** conducted by the U-M School of Public Health and Medical School found that patients who treated chronic pain with medical marijuana had a 64 percent reduction in their use of prescription opioids.

Using an online questionnaire, the study's researchers undertook a cross-sectional retrospective survey of 244 medical marijuana patients suffering from chronic pain who purchased their medical marijuana from the **Om of Medicine**, a legal dispensary in Michigan, between November 2013 and February 2015. The questionnaire collected demographic info, modifications in opioid use, types of medication used, side effects before and after initiating use of medical marijuana and quality of life.

Of the 244 medical marijuana users, 185 completed the questionnaire so only the completed questionnaires were used to calculate the study's results; among those, medical marijuana use was associated with a reduction in medication side effects and medications used, a 64 percent reduction in use of prescription opioids and 45 percent of participants reported an improved quality of life.

According to **Kevin F. Boehnke**, lead author of the study and a doctoral student in the U-M School of Public Health's Department of Environmental Health Sciences, "We're in the midst of an opioid epidemic and we need to figure out what to do about it . . . I'm hoping our research continues a conversation of cannabis as a potential alternative for opioids."

"We are learning that the higher the dose of opioids people are taking, the higher the risk of death from overdose. This magnitude of reduction in our study is significant enough to affect an individual's risk of accidental death from overdose," said Dr. Daniel Clauw, the study's senior author and a professor of pain management anesthesiology at the U-M Medical School.

"We would caution against rushing to change current clinical practice towards cannabis, but note that this study suggests that cannabis is an effective pain medication and agent to prevent opioid overuse," Boehnke added.