

Patients curious about medical marijuana treatments

January 16 2014

Ever since medical marijuana became legal in Illinois on Jan. 1, Loyola University Medical Center neurologist and multiple sclerosis specialist Dr. Matthew McCoyd has been inundated with questions from his patients.

The topic typically comes up at the end of the visit, when the patient brings up one last thing: What does Dr. McCoyd think about [medical marijuana](#)?

"It's an extremely common question," McCoyd said.

There are anecdotal reports that marijuana can relieve pain and spasticity in MS patients, but there is little evidence from clinical trials that marijuana is effective, McCoyd said. However, he noted that a marijuana-based drug called Sativex has been approved in Britain, Canada and other countries for the treatment of MS spasticity. A small pump delivers a precise amount of the peppermint-flavored medicine with each spray. The drug, extracted from cannabis plants, has been shown in [clinical trials](#) to be effective.

McCoyd said medical marijuana may be an option for carefully selected MS patients who are Illinois residents. Like any prescription medication, there is a concern for medication abuse, which will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

McCoyd said medical marijuana could also be prescribed to help relieve

muscle spasms in patients with [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis](#) (ALS), often referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease, another qualifying medical condition under the new law.

On Jan. 1, Illinois began a four-year trial program that will allow [patients](#) with MS and certain other conditions to obtain prescriptions for medical marijuana. MS is among the main indications for medical marijuana.

McCoyd said there are differences between medical marijuana and marijuana sold on the street. Street marijuana has higher concentrations of THC, the compound that provides the drug's high. Medical marijuana has less THC and higher concentrations of cannabinoid compounds.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

Citation: Patients curious about medical marijuana treatments (2014, January 16) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-patients-curious-medical-marijuana-treatments.html>

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