Adolescents in substance abuse treatment report using someone else's medical marijuana

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A study published in the July 2012 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* found that diverted medical marijuana use among adolescents receiving treatment for substance abuse is very common.

Study participants from two adolescent substance abuse treatment programs in the Denver metropolitan area were asked questions about their medical marijuana use.121 of 164 adolescents (73.8%) reported using medical marijuana that had been recommended for someone else, also known as diverted medical marijuana, a median of 50 times. In the study, adolescents who used medical marijuana began using marijuana regularly at a younger age, and showed more marijuana abuse /dependence and conduct disorder symptoms than adolescents who did not use medical marijuana. Additionally, most of the adolescents rated smoking marijuana overall as having slight or no risk.

Recent state and federal policy changes have allowed for more widespread legalized medical marijuana use in Colorado. At the time of the study only 41 adolescents in the state held valid registry identification cards for medical marijuana, which suggests that adolescents using medical marijuana are more likely to have obtained it from adult registered users than from peers. The study also calls into question the adequacy of the safeguards meant to prevent medical marijuana use by individuals to whom it was not recommended,

adolescents in particular. As the study authors note, in Colorado, medical marijuana is not handled like other medications that are approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): once approved for medical marijuana usage, individuals can purchase different amounts or even grow a personal supply.

Lead author Dr. Salomonsen-Sautel said of the study, "Many high-risk adolescent patients in substance abuse treatment have used diverted medical marijuana on multiple occasions, which implies that substantial diversion is occurring from registered users. Our results support the need for policy changes that protect against diversion of medical marijuana to adolescents."

In a related editorial, Dr. Alessandra Kazura raises questions about the safety and efficacy of marijuana as a medical treatment and discusses the perceptions adolescents may have about marijuana and its potential risks.

More information: The article "Medical Marijuana Use Among Adolescents in Substance Abuse Treatment" by Stacy Salomonsen-Sautel, Joseph T. Sakai, Christian Thurstone, Robin Corley, Christian Hopfer, (dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2012.04.004) appears in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 51, Issue 7 (July 2012). Dr. Kazura's related editorial, "Medical Marijuana and Teens: Does an Adjective Make a Difference?" appears in the same issue.

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