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Cannabis, pain, and sleep: lessons from therapeutic clinical trials of Sativex, a cannabis-based medicine.

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Abstract

Cannabis sativa L. has been utilized for treatment of pain and sleep disorders since ancient times. This review examines modern studies on effects of Delta9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD) on sleep. It goes on to report new information on the effects on sleep in the context of medical treatment of neuropathic pain and symptoms of multiple sclerosis, employing standardized oromucosal cannabis-based medicines containing primarily THC, CBD, or a 1 : 1 combination of the two (Sativex). Sleep-laboratory results indicate a mild activating effect of CBD, and slight residual sedation with THC-predominant extracts. Experience to date with Sativex in numerous Phase I-III studies in 2000 subjects with 1000 patient years of exposure demonstrate marked improvement in subjective sleep parameters in patients with a wide variety of pain conditions including multiple sclerosis, peripheral neuropathic pain, intractable cancer pain, and rheumatoid arthritis, with an acceptable adverse event profile. No tolerance to the benefit of Sativex on pain or sleep, nor need for dosage increases have been noted in safety extension studies of up to four years, wherein 40-50% of subjects attained good or very good sleep quality, a key source of disability in chronic pain syndromes that may contribute to patients' quality of life.

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