

Practices and perspectives on medical cannabis and cannabinoids: A survey of the National Psoriasis Foundation Medical Advisory Board



To the Editor: Cannabinoids are endogenous and exogenous chemicals with antipruritic, anti-inflammatory, and antinociceptive properties yet to be fully explored.¹ Increases in access to cannabinoid-derived medical products parallel the interest of patients and dermatologists regarding potential therapeutic uses for a variety of skin conditions.^{2,3} Connecticut is the only state currently listing psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis as indications for medical cannabis, though 7 states include arthritis. However, the scientific literature validating the efficacy and safety of cannabinoids for common chronic inflammatory skin diseases, such as psoriasis, is sparse.

Due to the lack of literature, often, expert opinion and experience is relied upon for emerging areas in dermatology.⁴ To assess expert perceptions on and experience with medical cannabis, an institutional review board–approved survey was disseminated to the National Psoriasis Foundation Medical Advisory Board in December 2021, with a 72% response rate (24/33). [Table 1](#) summarizes respondent demographics and results. Among dermatologists, 83.3% were uncertain if psoriasis was an indication for medical cannabis in the United States; similarly, 80% of rheumatologists surveyed were unsure about psoriatic arthritis. However, 83.3% of respondents supported medical cannabis use, though only 25.0% have educated patients on medical cannabis and 21.7% have recommended medical cannabis. This is likely because 79.2% reported they did not have sufficient knowledge to explain the risks and benefits of medical cannabis; only 16.7% of respondents had prior education on medical cannabis. Importantly, 100% of respondents expressed interest in learning about the potential uses of medical cannabis, very much in parallel with past studies which found an overwhelming majority of dermatologists surveyed also wanted more education on medical cannabis applications (91% to 93%).^{2,5}

Beyond familiarity, 55.5% and 60% of Medical Advisory Board dermatologists and rheumatologists, respectively, believe medical cannabis is safe for their patients, and no respondents believed that medical cannabis is unsafe. Reasons against

recommending medical cannabis included limited knowledge (60.0%), no experience (45.0%), and discomfort (20%). While only 21.1% of respondents previously recommended medical cannabis, 33.3% stated they are likely to recommend medical cannabis in the future, and only 16.7% stated they are unlikely to do so, highlighting a large subset who are undecided, likely due to limited experience.

54.2% of respondents reported 10 or more patients asked about medical cannabis in the past year. This is a remarkable increase in comparison to a 2018 survey study revealing 9.1% of dermatologists surveyed encountered 10 or more patients who asked about medical cannabis in the past year.⁵ This comes as no surprise given the rise in both consumer acceptance and utilization was highlighted in a recent survey study finding that 88% ($n = 508$) of participants approve of medical cannabis use.²

These data highlight that while experts support the use of medical cannabis and are recommending cannabinoids to some degree, gaps in education and research, rather than safety, are limiting dermatologists' and rheumatologists' comfort with medical cannabis for psoriasis. Regardless, increasing interest and utilization of medical cannabis among patients stress the importance of dermatologists being prepared, which in turn requires both mechanistic and clinical evidence-based education and training.

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Table I. Survey results summary of psoriatic experts regarding medical cannabis

Question	Answer	# of Responses	% of Responses
What is your primary specialty?	Yes	18/24	75
	No	5/24	21
	Other	1/24	4
What is your gender	Male	17/24	71
	Female	6/24	25
	Prefer not to answer	1/24	4
What is your age?	24-34	1/24	4
	35-44	7/24	29
	45-54	4/24	17
	55-64	7/24	29
	65+	5/24	21
How many years have you been in practice?	0-5	2/24	8
	6-10	4/24	17
	11-15	3/24	13
	16-20	2/24	8
	21-25	4/24	17
	26-30	3/24	13
	31+	6/24	25
What setting do you practice in?	Private practice	10/24	42
	Academic institution/Veterans Affairs	14/24	58
Where is the setting of your practice?	Large metropolitan area	21/24	88
	Small metropolitan area	2/24	8
	Suburban/rural	1/24	4
What is the legality of cannabis in your state of residence?	Legalized recreational and medical cannabis	12/24	50
	Legalized medical cannabis only	10/24	42
	No legalized cannabis	1/24	4
	Unsure	1/24	4
What is your state of residence?	California	5/24	21
	Colorado	1/24	4
	Florida	1/24	4
	Illinois	1/24	4
	Maryland	3/24	13
	Massachusetts	1/24	4
	North Carolina	1/24	4
	New York	6/24	25
	Pennsylvania	1/24	4
	Ohio	1/24	4
	Ontario, Canada	1/24	4
	Texas	1/24	4
	Utah	1/24	4
Do you support medical cannabis use?	Yes	20/24	83
	No	0/24	0
	Unsure	4/24	17
In the past year, how many patients or parents of patients have asked you about medical cannabis use?	0	3/24	13
	1-3	3/24	13
	4-6	1/24	4
	7-9	4/24	17
	10+	13/24	54
What forms of medical cannabis have you recommended?	Smoking/vaping	1/6	17
	Topical	3/6	50
	Edible	2/6	33
Have you ever educated your patients on medical cannabis use?	Yes	6/24	25
	No	18/24	75

Continued

Table I. Cont'd

Question	Answer	# of Responses	% of Responses
Do you feel as though you have sufficient knowledge to explain the risks and benefits of medical cannabis treatment if asked by a patient?	Yes	5/24	21
	No	19/24	79
Do you believe that medical cannabinoids can worsen psoriatic disease?	Yes	1/24	4
	No	13/24	54
	Unsure	10/24	42
Do you believe that medical cannabinoids can inhibit the TH17 pathway?	Yes	4/24	17
	No	3/24	13
	Unsure	17/24	71
If a cannabinoid-based drug was approved by the Food and Drug Administration, would you feel comfortable proposing it to your patients?	Yes	17/24	71
	No	0/24	0
	Unsure	7/24	29
Have you previously recommended medical cannabis to your patients?	Dermatologist: yes	3/18	17
	Dermatologist: no	15/18	83
	Rheumatologist: yes	2/5	40
	Rheumatologist: no	3/5	60
Can over-the-counter/recreational cannabis products have any therapeutic benefit??	Dermatologist: yes	5/18	28
	Dermatologist: no	2/18	11
	Dermatologist: unsure	11/18	61
	Rheumatologist: yes	2/5	40
	Rheumatologist: no	0/5	0
	Rheumatologist: unsure	3/5	60

Summarized demographic data and survey responses.

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Conflicts of interest

None disclosed.

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