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Drug Alcohol Depend. 2014 Oct 1;143:189-97. doi: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2014.07.027. Epub 2014 Aug 1.

Abstinence phenomena of chronic cannabis-addicts prospectively monitored during controlled inpatient detoxification: Cannabis withdrawal syndrome and its correlation with delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol and -metabolites in serum.

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Author information

Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To investigate the course of cannabis withdrawal syndrome (CWS) within a controlled inpatient detoxification setting and to correlate severity of CWS with the serum-levels of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and its main metabolites 11-hydroxy-delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC-OH) and 11-nor-delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol-9-carboxylic acid (THC-COOH).

METHODS: Thirty-nine treatment-seeking chronic cannabis dependents (ICD-10) were studied on admission and on abstinent days 2, 4, 8 and 16, using a CWS-checklist (MWC) and the Clinical Global Impression-Severity scale (CGI-S). Simultaneously obtained serum was analysed to its concentration of THC, THC-OH and THC-COOH.

RESULTS: MWC peaked on day 4 (10.4±4.6 from 39 points) and declined to 2.9±2.4 points on day 16. Women had a significantly stronger CWS than men. The CWS was dominated by craving>restlessness>nervousness>sleeplessness. CGI-S peaked with 5 out of 7 points. On admission, THC and its metabolites did negatively correlate with the severity of CWS. There was no significant correlation afterwards, no matter if CWS was medicated or not. THC-OH in serum declined most rapidly below detection limit, on median at day 4. At abstinence day 16, the THC-levels of 28.2% of the patients were still above 1g/ml (range: 1.3 to 6.4ng/ml).

CONCLUSIONS: CWS increased and then decreased without any correlation between its severity and the serum-levels of THC or its main metabolites after admission. According to the CGI-S, most patients achieved the condition of 'markedly ill'. Serum THC-OH was most clearly associated with recent cannabis use. Residual THC was found in the serum of almost one-third of the patients at abstinence day 16.

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KEYWORDS: Cannabis-withdrawal syndrome; Chronic cannabis addicts; Serum THC-COOH; Serum THC-OH; Serum Δ-9-tetrahydrocannabinol

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