Neurology: Clinical Practice Publish Ahead of Print
DOI: 10.1212/CPJ.0000000000001155

Sources of Cannabis Information and Medical Guidance for Neurologic Use: NARCOMS Survey of People Living With Multiple Sclerosis

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Neurology® Clinical Practice Published Ahead of Print articles have been peer reviewed and accepted for publication. This manuscript will be published in its final form after copyediting, page composition, and review of proofs. Errors that could affect the content may be corrected during these processes.

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Number of characters in title: 130

Abstract Word count: 250

Word count of main text: 3000

References: 31

Figures: 3

Tables: 2

Clinical Trial registration number: Not applicable

Supplemental: STROBE checklist

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Search Terms:

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge and thank Dr Lesley Taylor of Alchemy Medical Writing Ltd. for medical writing and editorial support, which was funded by Greenwich Biosciences, Inc. NARCOMS is a project of the Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Centers (CMSC) and the Foundation of the CMSC.

Study Funding: Greenwich Biosciences, Inc. provided funding for the supplemental survey.

Disclosures: K.M.J. Smith, J.R. Steinerman, and K.E. Nichol are, or were, employees of Greenwich Biosciences; R.A. Marrie receives research funding from CIHR, Research Manitoba, Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada, Multiple Sclerosis Scientific Research Foundation, Crohn's and Colitis Canada, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, CMSC, the US Department of Defense, Biogen Idec and Roche. She is supported by the Waugh Family Chair in Multiple Sclerosis; A. Salter receives research funding from the CMSC and National Multiple Sclerosis Society; R.J. Fox receives personal consulting fees from AB Science, Biogen, Celgene, EMD Serono, Genentech, Genzyme, Immunic, Janssen, Novartis, Sanofi, and TG Therapeutics; serves on advisory committees for Actelion, Biogen, Immunic, Novartis, and Sanofi, and receives clinical trial contract and research grant funding from Biogen, Novartis, and Sanofi; G. Cutter Data and Safety Monitoring Boards: Astra-Zeneca, Avexis Pharmaceuticals, Biolinex, Brainstorm Cell Therapeutics, Bristol Meyers Squibb/Celgene, CSL Behring, Galmed Pharmaceuticals, Green Valley Pharma, Mapi Pharmaceuticals LTD, Merck, Merck/Pfizer, Mitsubishi Tanabe Pharma Holdings, Opko Biologics, Neurim, Novartis, Ophazyme, Sanofi Aventis, Reata Pharmaceuticals, Teva Pharmaceuticals, VielaBio Inc, NHLBI (Protocol Review Committee), NICHD (OPRU oversight committee). Consulting or Advisory Boards: Alexion, Antisense Therapeutics, Biodelivery Sciences International, Biogen, Clinical Trial Solutions LLC, Genzyme, Genentech, GW Pharmaceuticals, Immunic, Klein-Buendel Incorporated, Medimmune/Viela Bio, Medday, Merck/Serono, Neurogenesis LTD, Novartis, Osmotica Pharmaceuticals, Perception Neurosciences, Protalix Biotherapeutics, Recursion/Cerexis Pharmaceuticals, Regeneron, Reckover Pharmaceuticals, Roche, SAB Biotherapeutics, TG Therapeutics. Dr. Cutter is employed by the University of Alabama at Birmingham and President of Pythagoras, Inc. a private consulting company located in Birmingham AL.

Abstract

Objective: As cannabis products become increasingly accessible across the United States, understanding how patients obtain medical information on cannabis and view the role of their healthcare provider in providing information is important.

Methods: Participants with multiple sclerosis (MS) from the North American Research Committee on Multiple Sclerosis (NARCOMS) registry completed a supplemental survey on Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol-containing cannabis use between March and April 2020. Participants reported dialogue with healthcare providers regarding cannabis use, information sources used to

make product decisions, and expenditure on cannabis. Findings are reported using descriptive statistics.

Results: Overall, 3249 participants responded (47% response rate) of whom 31% ever used cannabis and 20% currently used cannabis for MS. To determine presumed cannabis contents, respondents who had ever used cannabis (ever users) most often used dispensary-provided information (39%), word of mouth/dealer/friend (29%), and unregulated product labels (24%). For general information on cannabis for MS, ever users most often used dispensary staff (38%) and friends (32%). The primary source of medical guidance among ever users was most often ‘nobody or myself’ (48%) followed by a dispensary professional (21%); only 12% relied on their MS physician, although 70% had discussed cannabis with their MS physician. Most current users (62%) typically sourced their cannabis from a dispensary. The most common factor in selecting a cannabis product was perceived quality and safety (70%).

Conclusions: Participants most often received information on cannabis for MS from dispensaries, unregulated product labels, and friends; only a small proportion used healthcare providers. Evidence-based patient and physician education is needed.

Introduction

Interest in cannabis use for symptom management in neurological conditions, such as multiple sclerosis (MS) and epilepsy,^{1,2} is increasing as more data become available and access eases from a legal perspective.^{3,4}

Among people with MS (PwMS), the high prevalence of pain, sleep disturbance, and comorbid symptoms, coupled with the lack of sufficiently effective treatment options for those symptoms, there has been increased interest in cannabis products.⁵ In our 2020 survey of participants in the North American Research Committee in Multiple Sclerosis (NARCOMS) self-report registry, 31% of PwMS had ever used cannabis to treat MS symptoms, and 20% had used cannabis within 30 days of survey administration.⁶ The survey definition of cannabis/marijuana did not include products marketed as only cannabidiol (CBD) or hemp CBD.

The source of patient information about cannabis products is relatively unknown. We report how PwMS communicate about cannabis use with their healthcare providers, which information sources they use to make product decisions, the types of product they are choosing, and how much they spend on cannabis products. We hypothesized that participants in our NARCOMS survey obtained cannabis product information and medical guidance from sources other than their health care provider.

Methods

Study design

The NARCOMS registry is a voluntary self-report registry for PwMS.⁷ Participants are asked to update their information semi-annually. Participants may also be invited to participate in supplemental surveys.

Active, US-based participants as of 28 February 2020 (N=6934) were invited to participate in this online supplemental survey; no other eligibility criteria were applied. The survey was conducted using REDCap hosted at Washington University.⁸

Standard Protocol Approvals, Registrations, and Patient Consents

The survey was approved by the Washington University Institutional Review Board. By responding to the survey, participants gave informed consent to participate in the research. As cannabis use is not legal throughout the US, NARCOMS obtained a certificate of confidentiality⁹ to protect the privacy of research subjects by prohibiting disclosure of identifiable, sensitive research information to anyone not connected to the research, except when the subject consented, or in limited other specific situations.

Demographic and clinical data

For participants who agreed to link their existing information with the cannabis survey, their semi-annual update responses from 2019 were used to ascertain annual household income, employment status, alcohol use, smoking status, region of residence, disability status, clinical course, and disease-modifying therapy (DMT) use (yes/no).

Annual household income was reported as <\$15,000, \$15,000-\$30,000, \$30,001-\$50,000, \$50,001-\$100,000, >\$100,000, or “I do not wish to answer.” Current employment status was categorized as full-time, part-time, or not employed. Alcohol use was categorized as never, monthly or less, 2-4 times per month, 2-3 times per week, or >4 times per week. Smoking status was categorized as not at all, some days, or every day. Region of residence was categorized as to whether the use of cannabis for medical purposes was currently legal.¹⁰ Disability status was categorized using the Patient Determined Disease Steps: normal, mild disability, moderate disability, gait disability, early cane, late cane, bilateral support, wheelchair/scooter, bedridden. Clinical course was categorized as clinically isolated syndrome, relapsing remitting, secondary

progressive, primary progressive, don't know or unsure, MS diagnosis not confirmed by a physician, or other. Methodology relating to demographics information collected have been previously reported.⁶

Cannabis use

Participants were instructed that in this survey “cannabis/marijuana” referred to products derived from the cannabis/marijuana plant and did not include products marketed as only CBD or hemp CBD. This will be henceforth referred to as simply “cannabis”. Where possible, questions regarding cannabis were sourced from national US surveys¹¹⁻¹⁴ to ensure the questions were validated,⁶ and enhance comparability.

Information sources

Participants who reported ever using cannabis indicated what information they used to determine the cannabis product contents used to treat MS symptoms: the product label, product website, certificate of analysis, dispensary-provided information, word of mouth/dealer/friend, healthcare provider, or other. They also reported where they obtained general information about how to use cannabis as follows: healthcare provider, dispensary staff, product packaging or website, internet, friends, scientific publications, advocacy group, online communities, or other.

Medical guidance on cannabis use

Participants reported the primary person who provided them with medical guidance regarding cannabis use as follows: physician (MS provider or other physician), other licensed healthcare professional, pharmacist, dispensary professional, other patients with MS, or nobody/myself.

Participants reported whether they had discussed their cannabis use to treat MS symptoms with their MS physician, and whether they would feel comfortable discussing their cannabis use with this physician as follows: ‘yes, very comfortable’, ‘yes, comfortable’, ‘no, uncomfortable’, and ‘no, very uncomfortable’. Participants reported potential reasons for not feeling comfortable

discussing cannabis with their MS physician including the belief that the physician would not approve of the cannabis use, concerns around stigma of raising this topic, discomfort initiating the conversation around cannabis use, not being interested in discussing it/ lack of relevance, or the physician having never raised the topic. All participants reported whether they thought their MS provider would feel comfortable with their cannabis use as follows: believing that the physician would be/is comfortable with it, would not be/is not comfortable with it, or that that they would/would not be comfortable with it if the participant used cannabis.

Participant preferences

Participants reported their typical source of cannabis as follows: I grow my own, someone grows it for me, from a dispensary, online, from an acquaintance, from a family member or friend, from a dealer, or other. They also reported the most important factors when selecting a source from which to purchase cannabis (such as low price, quality and safety, sales support, location, accessibility, ability to purchase online, anonymity/discretion, access to preferred potency/formulation, access to preferred strain, and access to products not available in licensed stores or online).

Spending on cannabis

Participants reported how much they spend on cannabis in an average month. Options included nothing, \$1-\$10, \$11-\$25, \$26-\$50, \$51-\$100, \$101-\$150, \$151-\$250, \$251-\$500, \$501-\$750, \$751-\$1,000, or >\$1,000.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize responses with mean (standard deviation [SD]) or median (25th, 75th percentiles) for continuous variables and frequency (percentage) for categorical variables. Differences between groups were determined by t-test or Wilcoxon test for continuous variables and chi-square or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate, for categorical

variables. The association between legal medical use of cannabis and physician comfort and dialogue among never vs ever and past vs current users was examined using a Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel test.

Data availability

Patient-level data cannot be provided in keeping with the certificate of confidentiality, but aggregated data that support these findings will be made available to qualified researchers upon request to the corresponding author.

Results

Participants

Of the 6934 invited participants, 3249 (46.9%) responded, of whom 3240 (99.7%) responded to the item regarding cannabis use for MS (Figure 1). Small differences between respondents and non-respondents to the survey in the NARCOMS population were identified for age, race, and education level.⁶

As reported previously,⁶ most respondents were female and White (Table 1). Approximately two-thirds had a bachelor's degree or higher and were unemployed. The mean (SD) age was 61.3 (10.0) years; mean (SD) age at MS symptom onset was 31.2 (10.3) years; and median (25th, 75th percentile) disability level was 3-Gait Disability (1-Mild Disability, 6-Bilateral Support). Almost two-thirds of the respondents were taking a DMT. Most respondents (76.1%) lived in a state where the medical use of cannabis was currently legal and 55.3% of respondents used cannabis before their MS diagnosis.

Cannabis use

Of the 3240 respondents, 1012 (31%) reported ever using cannabis to treat MS symptoms (ever users), 636 (20%) reported current use (current users [within 30 days of the survey]), 376 (12%) reported past use (past users), and 2228 (69%) reported having never used it (never users). A higher proportion of ever users resided in a state where cannabis use was currently legal compared to never users (81.2% vs 73.7%, $p < 0.0001$) and between current and past users (84.0% vs 76.6%, $p = 0.009$).

Information sources

To determine cannabis contents, ever users were most likely to use dispensary-provided information (39%), word of mouth/dealer/friend (29%), and unregulated product label (24%) (Table 2). Among ever users, current users were more likely than past users to determine contents from dispensary-provided information (45% vs 29%; $P < 0.001$) and the unregulated product label (27% vs 18%; $P = 0.002$).

To obtain general information about cannabis use for MS, <15% of ever users relied on healthcare providers; instead, dispensary staff (38%) and friends (32%) were the most frequently reported sources (Table 2). Current users vs past users more often cited dispensary staff (43% vs 30%; $P < 0.001$) and the internet (20% vs 13%; $P = 0.007$) as sources of information on using cannabis for MS.

The primary source of medical guidance among the 1012 ever users was most often cited as ‘nobody or myself’ (48%), followed by a dispensary professional (21%) (Table 2). Only 112 (12%) relied on their MS physician (Figure 2), with no difference between past and current users. Current users were more likely than past users to rely on a physician different from their MS provider (11% vs 4.6%; Table 2).

Of the ever users, most (70%) had discussed cannabis with the physician who treats their MS (Figure 2). The proportion of participants who discussed cannabis with their physician was higher among current users vs past users (75% vs 60%; $P < 0.001$).

Comfort and dialogue with physician

Of the 3240 total respondents, 1755 (56%) reported being very comfortable discussing cannabis use for symptom management with their MS physician (Table 3). More ever users (72%) reported feeling very comfortable than never users (50%) ($P < 0.001$). More current users were likely to feel very comfortable (74%) than past users (67%) ($P = 0.042$).

Among ever users, a small minority provided reasons for not feeling comfortable discussing cannabis with their MS provider, including a belief that their MS physician does not approve of cannabis use (3.4%), concern about the stigma of raising this topic with their MS physician (3.2%), or that their MS physician had never raised the topic of cannabis (2.9%).

More ever users than never users responded positively to questions regarding their care providers beliefs, except for the question ‘I am not interested in discussing it/ it is not relevant to me’, where more never users answered ‘yes’ compared with ever users (9.6% vs 1.2%; $P < 0.001$). For the option ‘My MS physician has never raised the topic of cannabis’, never and ever users did not differ significantly (‘yes’ answers: 4.2% vs 2.9%; $P = 0.070$). Responses did not differ significantly between past and current users, except for ‘I am not interested in discussing it/ it is not relevant to me’, where a higher percentage of past users answered ‘yes’ than current users (2.7% vs 0.3%; $P < 0.001$).

Most never and ever users believed that their MS physician would be comfortable with their cannabis use (66% and 78%). Among ever users, more past users vs current users believed that their MS physician would not be comfortable with their cannabis use (29% vs 19%; $P < 0.001$).

Residence in a state where cannabis use was currently legal was associated with more frequent belief that their MS physician would be comfortable with cannabis use (eTable 1).

Product preferences, sources, and cost

Of the 636 current users, 393 (62%) typically source cannabis from a dispensary, 112 (18%) from a family member or friend, and 82 (13%) from an acquaintance (eFigure 1).

The most common factor in selecting a source to purchase cannabis was perceived quality and safety (n=448 [70%]), followed by access to preferred THC and or CBD potencies/formulations (n=252 [40%]), location (n=246 [39%]), and sales support (n=194 [31%]) (eFigure 2).

Spending per month on cannabis was reported as nothing (get it for free or trade) for 11% of participants, \$1-\$25 for 17%, \$26-\$50 for 18%, \$51-\$100 for 24%, \$101-\$250 for 23%, \$251-\$500 for 6%, and \$501-\$1,000 for 1%.

Discussion

The prevalence of cannabis use by PwMS is rising.^{5,15} While one-third of respondents reported ever using cannabis to treat MS symptoms, 20% reported current use. Ever use and current use of cannabis were higher in this survey compared with previous NARCOMS reports,¹³ possibly reflecting increasing acceptance of cannabis use and/or the increasing number of states with legalized cannabis possession and use.

Sources of information used by PwMS broadly reflected where participants acquired cannabis products, which was most often a dispensary. Family, friends, acquaintances, dealers, and word of mouth were also reported as product information sources, but <10% of participants reported obtaining product information from healthcare providers. In another recent survey of cannabis use in PwMS in the US, <1% of participants received assistance from their provider regarding selection of cannabinoid formulations.⁵

Participants reported low reliance on their physicians for medical guidance regarding cannabis use. In another recent survey of cannabis use in PwMS in the US, 18% of participants reported discussing cannabinoids for MS symptom management with a healthcare provider.⁵ The low reliance on clinicians for guidance on therapeutic cannabis use may reflect the lack of a prescription product in the US. Also, clinicians generally lack knowledge of the THC, CBD, and other contents of specific cannabis products and data regarding efficacy, safety, dosing, and patient selection, and therefore may not provide guidance, even while remaining open to more general discussion of cannabis. Moreover, despite PwMS being comfortable discussing cannabis use, a substantial minority believe their MS physician would not be comfortable with their cannabis use, particularly in states where use was not currently legal, and are therefore unlikely to seek medical guidance on the topic. These findings have important implications for clinical care of PwMS taking cannabinoids, highlighting the gap between the rapid dissemination of informal sources of information on cannabis products compared with less accessible (though more trustworthy) healthcare provider-based information.¹⁶

Ongoing physician education is recognized as important to the ‘shared decision-making’ paradigm, to provide patients with the most current information.¹⁷ This model has been implemented in MS care, in which the clinician and patient decide on DMT regimens together, considering the patient’s individual needs, preferences and values.¹⁸ Despite the prevalence of cannabis use among PwMS, lack of healthcare provider knowledge or awareness may hamper decision-making in MS care. A recent cross-sectional analysis of healthcare provider’s knowledge regarding cannabis use for medical purposes indicated considerable gaps in knowledge regarding clinical effects, risks and harms, pharmacology, and effects on pain, MS spasticity, and seizures.¹⁹ A recent survey supports this idea, with most Australian general practitioners feeling their knowledge of medical cannabis was inadequate, and only 29% feeling comfortable discussing cannabis use with patients.²⁰ Consistent with those studies, our findings

highlight the need for further education of healthcare providers regarding the risks and benefits of cannabis and cannabinoid use.

PwMS often have symptom management regimens and may also take herbal and other supplements.^{21,22} Thus, the possibility of pharmacological interactions is high.²³ CBD and THC affect common targets for drug metabolism (such as cytochrome P450 [CYP]3A4/2C19 enzymes), which may affect the pharmacokinetics/pharmacodynamics of other drugs that interact with these pathways.^{24,25} CBD or marijuana use decreases clearance of drugs and their metabolites that utilize CYP2C19 (e.g., warfarin), increases clearance of CYP1A2-metabolised drugs, and may result in adverse additive effects in combination with sympathomimetics (e.g., hypertension), alcohol and opioids (e.g., ataxia), and anticholinergics (e.g., tachycardia).²⁵ Thus, it is important that healthcare providers are aware of all concomitant therapies, and that patients are comfortable discussing their cannabis use with their MS physician.

Although informal sources of information were reported, participants cited quality and safety as the most important factor in selecting products, followed by preferred THC and or CBD potencies/formulations, location, and sales support. This suggests PwMS are eager to have more information but the lack of adequate controlled studies makes it difficult for PwMS to obtain medical guidance regarding a specific THC:CBD ratio or dose. Furthermore, content in unregulated products frequently does not match the label.²⁶⁻²⁸

This survey has several limitations. NARCOMS is a voluntary registry, so may not represent the general MS population. However, the participant population has an age distribution close to the peak age in MS prevalence reported by Wallin et al.²⁹ Women were over-represented in this study with a female to male ratio of 3.6:1, even after accounting for the greater prevalence of MS in women than in men (2.6:1).²⁹ Despite stringent efforts to ensure confidentiality, response bias may have affected some responses. As this was a single survey, it represents a snapshot in time; patterns of cannabis use and the trends discussed in this manuscript are likely to be dynamic. Our comparisons of information sources across groups (e.g., current and past users) cannot account

for obtaining that information at different points in time nor for changes in the type or accessibility of information provided by dispensaries. We also do not know if cannabis use was legal in a participants states at the time of use as laws have rapidly changed recently. Only data for use of cannabis products (containing THC in addition to CBD, and excluding products reported to contain CBD alone) was collected. We were unable to evaluate whether PwMS would use cannabis less often if studies were to show a harmful impact in MS, but this warrants future study once randomized trials are performed and published. The analyses were limited by incomplete responses for some elements. Healthcare providers' perspectives regarding their comfort in discussing cannabis use for MS were not captured. A recent systematic review suggested that practitioners, although generally supportive of the use of medicinal cannabis, self-perceived a lack of knowledge and limited accessible information as barriers.³⁰ A survey of Canadian physicians showed that over two-thirds would feel more comfortable discussing medical cannabis with their patients if they had access to more formal education on the topic.³¹ Our findings indicate that PwMS use 'informal' sources for information on cannabis products. Involvement of healthcare providers in decision-making surrounding cannabis use by PwMS is limited, despite patient willingness to discuss cannabis with providers. Evidence-based education is needed to increase clinician knowledge, and further information is needed to determine what is most needed to take a more active role in providing medical guidance to their patients.

Appendix 1

Name	Location	Contribution
Amber Salter, PhD	UT Southwestern Medical Center, Texas	Design and conceptualized study; analyzed the data; drafted the manuscript for intellectual content.
Gary Cutter, PhD	The University of Alabama at Birmingham, Alabama	Interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
Ruth Ann Marrie, MD PhD	Max Rady College of Medicine, Manitoba	Interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
Kathryn Nichol, PhD	Formerly Greenwich Biosciences, Inc., Carlsbad	Interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
Joshua R. Steiner, MD	Greenwich Biosciences, Inc., Carlsbad	Designed and conceptualized study; interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
Karry M. J. Smith, PhD MPH	Formerly Greenwich Biosciences, Inc., Carlsbad	Designed and conceptualized study; interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.
Robert J. Fox, MD	Mellen Center for Multiple Sclerosis, Cleveland	Interpreted the data; revised the manuscript for intellectual content.

Supplement-<http://links.lww.com/CPJ/A326>

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Figure Legends

Figure 1. Survey respondents flow diagram

Figure 2. Proportion of participants that have discussed cannabis use with/sought medical guidance from their MS physician

Legend: Proportion of participants that have discussed their cannabis use with the physicians who treat their MS compared with the proportion of participants who have sought medical guidance around cannabis use from their MS physician (ever, past, and current users)

Footnote: MS, multiple sclerosis.

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Tables

Table 1. Demographics and clinical characteristics

Characteristic	Total ^a (N=3240)	Never Users (N=2228)	Ever Users (N=1012)	Past Users (N=376)	Current Users (N=636)
Demographics					
Female, n (%)^{b,c}	2516 (78.5)	1745 (79.1)	771 (77.1)	306 (82.7)	465 (73.8)
Age at survey (years), mean (SD)^{b,c}	61.3 (10.0)	62.0 (10.1)	59.7 (9.6)	60.7 (10.0)	59.1 (9.4)
Age groups at survey (years), n (%)^{b,c}					
18-24	1 (0.03)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.1)	1 (0.3)	0 (0.0)
25-34	37 (1.2)	22 (1.0)	15 (1.5)	6 (1.6)	9 (1.4)
35-44	170 (5.30)	112 (5.1)	58 (5.8)	19 (5.1)	39 (6.2)
45-54	532 (16.6)	343 (15.6)	189 (18.8)	56 (15.1)	133 (21.0)
55-64	1148 (35.8)	741 (33.6)	407 (40.5)	146 (39.3)	261 (41.3)
65-74	1099 (34.3)	807 (36.6)	292 (29.1)	124 (33.3)	168 (26.6)
≥75	221 (6.9)	179 (8.1)	42 (4.2)	20 (5.4)	22 (3.5)
Race, n (%)^{b,c}					
White	2844 (88.5)	1989 (89.9)	855 (85.4)	318 (85.5)	537 (85.4)
African American	56 (1.7)	28 (1.3)	28 (2.8)	11 (3.0)	17 (2.7)
Other	314 (9.8)	196 (8.9)	118 (11.8)	43 (11.6)	75 (11.9)
Bachelor's degree or higher, n (%)^{b,c}	1885 (60.6)	1353 (63.0)	532 (55.1)	205 (56.3)	327 (54.4)
Resides in a state with legal use of cannabis for medical use, n (%)^{b,c}					
Yes	2464 (76.1)	1642 (73.7)	822 (81.2)	288 (76.6)	534 (84.0)
No	743 (22.9)	565 (25.4)	178 (17.6)	84 (22.3)	94 (14.8)
Unknown	33 (1.0)	21 (0.9)	12 (1.2)	4 (1.1)	8 (1.3)
Employed past 6 months, n (%)^{b,c}					
Full-time	685 (22.6)	520 (24.6)	165 (18.1)	54 (15.6)	111 (19.5)
Part-time	329 (10.9)	235 (11.1)	94 (10.3)	30 (8.7)	64 (11.3)
Not employed	2015 (66.5)	1360 (64.3)	655 (71.7)	262 (75.7)	393 (69.2)
Clinical data					
Age at symptom onset, mean (SD)^{b,c}	31.2 (10.3)	31.7 (10.2)	30.0 (10.3)	30.3 (10.2)	29.8 (10.4)
Age at diagnosis, mean (SD)^{b,c}	38.7 (9.8)	38.8 (9.8)	38.3 (9.7)	38.9 (9.7)	38.0 (9.6)
MS clinical course, n (%)^{b,c}					
CIS	51 (1.7)	40 (1.9)	11 (1.2)	5 (1.4)	6 (1.0)
RRMS	1745 (56.5)	1261 (58.5)	484 (51.9)	180 (50.6)	304 (52.8)
SPMS	832 (27.0)	534 (24.8)	298 (32.0)	111 (31.2)	187 (32.5)
PPMS	259 (8.4)	172 (8.0)	87 (9.3)	40 (11.2)	47 (8.2)
Don't know/unsure	156 (5.1)	116 (5.4)	40 (4.3)	14 (3.9)	26 (4.5)
MS diagnosis not confirmed	9 (0.29)	7 (0.32)	2 (0.21)	0 (0.0)	2 (0.35)
Other	34 (1.1)	24 (1.1)	10 (1.1)	6 (1.7)	4 (0.69)
Take DMT, n (%)^{b,c}					
Yes	1914 (62.5)	1349 (63.4)	565 (60.4)	208 (58.6)	357 (61.6)
No	1148 (37.5)	778 (36.6)	370 (39.6)	147 (41.4)	223 (38.4)
PDDS scale, median [25th, 75th percentiles]^{b,c}	3.0 [1.00, 6.0]	3.0 [1.00, 5.0]	4.0 [2.0, 6.0]	4.0 [2.0, 6.0]	4.0 [2.0, 6.0]
Ever used cannabis before MS diagnosis, n (%)^{b,c}					
Yes	1663 (55.3)	937 (45.1)	726 (77.8)	257 (73.4)	469 (80.5)
No	1329 (44.2)	1127 (54.3)	202 (21.7)	91 (26.0)	111 (19.0)
Unknown	17 (0.6)	12 (0.6)	5 (0.5)	2 (0.6)	3 (0.5)

CIS, clinically isolated syndrome; DMT, disease-modifying therapy; max, maximum; min, minimum; MS, multiple sclerosis; NRS, numerical rating scale; PDDS, Patient-Determined Disease Steps; PPMS, primary progressive multiple sclerosis; RRMS, relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis; SD, standard deviation; SPMS, secondary progressive multiple sclerosis.

^a Nine participants did not respond to the question.

^b For total, never users, and ever users, data were not available for all participants. Missing values: Gender = 35, Age at survey = 32, Race = 26, Education level = 127, Employed past 6 months = 211, Age at symptom onset = 61, Age at diagnosis = 66, MS clinical course = 154, Take DMT = 178, PDDS = 171, Ever used cannabis before MS diagnosis = 231.

^c For ever users, past users, and current users, data were not available for all participants. Missing values: Gender = 12, Age at survey = 8, Race = 11, Education level = 47, Employed past 6 months = 98, Age at symptom onset = 24, Age at diagnosis = 17, MS clinical course = 80, Take DMT = 77, PDDS = 68, Ever used cannabis before MS diagnosis = 152.

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Table 2. Product information sources and primary medical guidance on cannabis use among ever, past, and current users

Information source	Ever users for MS (N = 1012)	Past users for MS (N = 376)	Current users for MS (N = 636)
What information do you use to determine what exactly is in the cannabis product you use? (Check all that apply)			
<i>Dispensary-provided information</i>	396 (39.1)	109 (29.0)	287 (45.1)
<i>Word of mouth/dealer/friend</i>	295 (29.2)	99 (26.3)	196 (30.8)
<i>Product label</i>	240 (23.7)	69 (18.4)	171 (26.9)
<i>Certificate of analysis</i>	126 (12.5)	48 (12.8)	78 (12.3)
<i>Healthcare provider</i>	87 (8.6)	34 (9.0)	53 (8.3)
<i>Other</i>	73 (7.2)	29 (7.7)	44 (6.9)
<i>Claims on website of product</i>	64 (6.3)	20 (5.3)	44 (6.9)
Where do you get general information about cannabis and/or advice about how to use cannabis? (Check all that apply)			
Dispensary staff	383 (37.8)	111 (29.5)	272 (42.8)
Friends	326 (32.2)	111 (29.5)	215 (33.8)
Internet	177 (17.5)	50 (13.3)	127 (20.0)
Scientific publications	168 (16.6)	57 (15.2)	111 (17.5)
Healthcare provider	141 (13.9)	56 (14.9)	85 (13.4)
Medical claims on the packaging or manufacturer website	81 (8.0)	29 (7.7)	52 (8.2)
Other	65 (6.4)	22 (5.9)	43 (6.8)
Advocacy group	60 (5.9)	20 (5.3)	40 (6.3)
Online communities	34 (3.4)	14 (3.7)	20 (3.1)
Who is the primary person that provides you with medical guidance for your cannabis use for MS?^a			
Nobody or myself	458 (47.5)	167 (48.4)	291 (46.9)
Dispensary professional	203 (21.0)	77 (22.3)	126 (20.3)
Physician (same as MS provider)	112 (11.6)	40 (11.6)	72 (11.6)
Physician (different from MS provider)	81 (8.4)	16 (4.6)	65 (10.5)
Other patients with MS	74 (7.7)	32 (9.3)	42 (6.8)
Other licensed healthcare provider	27 (2.8)	10 (2.9)	17 (2.7)
Pharmacist	10 (1.0)	3 (0.87)	7 (1.1)

MS, multiple sclerosis.

Participants could indicate multiple responses for this question.

Values presented as N (column %).

^a Responses were missing for 47 ever users, 31 past users, and 16 current users.

Table 3. Physician communication regarding cannabis use among never, ever, past, and current users

	Total (N = 3240)	Never users for MS (N = 2228)	Ever users for MS (N = 1012)	Never vs ever users <i>P</i> -value	Past users for MS (N = 376)	Current users for MS (N = 636)	Past vs current users <i>P</i> -value
Would you be comfortable with your doctor who primarily manages your MS talking with you about cannabis to help treat your MS symptoms? ^a							
Yes, very comfortable	1755 (56.0)	1067 (49.2)	688 (71.5)	< 0.001	231 (67.0)	457 (74.1)	0.042
Yes, comfortable	1019 (32.5)	819 (37.7)	200 (20.8)		89 (25.8)	111 (18.0)	
No, uncomfortable	237 (7.6)	180 (8.3)	57 (5.9)		19 (5.5)	38 (6.2)	
No, very uncomfortable	121 (3.9)	104 (4.8)	17 (1.8)		6 (1.7)	11 (1.8)	
Potential reasons for not feeling comfortable discussing cannabis use with your MS provider:							
<i>I believe my MS physician does not approve of cannabis use</i>							
No	3174 (98.0)	2196 (98.6)	978 (96.6)	< 0.001	365 (97.1)	613 (96.4)	0.56
Yes	66 (2.0)	32 (1.4)	34 (3.4)		11 (2.9)	23 (3.6)	
<i>I am concerned about the stigma of raising this topic with my MS physician</i>							
No	3193 (98.5)	2213 (99.3)	980 (96.8)	< 0.001	369 (98.1)	611 (96.1)	0.069
Yes	47 (1.5)	15 (0.67)	32 (3.2)		7 (1.9)	25 (3.9)	
<i>I am not comfortable initiating the conversation about cannabis</i>							
No	3192 (98.5)	2204 (98.9)	988 (97.6)	0.005	369 (98.1)	619 (97.3)	0.41
Yes	48 (1.5)	24 (1.1)	24 (2.4)		7 (1.9)	17 (2.7)	
<i>I am not interested in discussing it / it is not relevant to me</i>							
No	3014 (93.0)	2014 (90.4)	1000 (98.8)	< 0.001	366 (97.3)	634 (99.7)	< 0.001
Yes	226 (7.0)	214 (9.6)	12 (1.2)		10 (2.7)	2 (0.3)	
<i>My MS physician has never raised the topic of cannabis</i>							
No	3118 (96.2)	2135 (95.8)	983 (97.1)	0.070	369 (98.1)	614 (96.5)	0.14
Yes	122 (3.8)	93 (4.2)	29 (2.9)		7 (1.9)	22 (3.5)	
As someone who does NOT currently use cannabis/marijuana for your MS, what do you believe your MS provider's comfort level with the use of cannabis/marijuana is? ^b							
<i>I believe my MS physician would be comfortable if I used cannabis</i>	-	1359 (65.7)	-	-	-	-	-
<i>I believe my MS physician would NOT be comfortable if I used cannabis</i>	-	711 (34.3)	-	-	-	-	-
As someone who currently uses cannabis/marijuana for your MS, what do you believe your MS provider's comfort level with your cannabis/marijuana use is? ^c							
<i>I believe my MS physician would be comfortable if I used cannabis</i>	-	-	729 (77.9)	-	229 (71.1)	500 (81.4)	< 0.001
<i>I believe my MS physician would NOT be comfortable if I used cannabis</i>	-	-	207 (22.1)	-	93 (28.9)	114 (18.6)	

Values presented as N (column %). *P*-values derived from chi-squared test.

MS, multiple sclerosis.

^a Responses were missing for 108 total, 58 never users, 50 ever users, 31 past users, and 19 current users.

^b Responses were missing for 158 never users.

^c Responses were missing for 76 ever users, 54 past users, and 22 current users.

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Neurol Clin Pract published online January 20, 2022

DOI 10.1212/CPJ.0000000000001155

This information is current as of January 20, 2022

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