

# PFCA

## Wellness Update

PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES, LLC

SUMMER 2022



### Message from Dr. Fernandez

**W**ith the recent NJ approval of recreational marijuana at dispensaries, we want to assure you are current on the benefits and risks of cannabis use, particularly if you are on psychiatric medications. This article will explain the psychopharmacology of cannabis.

We are also featuring an article on how best to deal with increased appetite and weight gain as a potential side effect to psychiatric medications. Better to catch this problem early rather than late.

Lastly, the front desk wants to remind you about MEDICARE re-enrollment and our new policy on prescription refills.

Enjoy the summer; May it be a cool one, and don't forget to wear your sunscreen. Sun is good for you, but too much of a good thing maybe not so good. Moderation is the key to life.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Fernandez*

### The Cannabis Question

*Marisa Fernandez, PFCA Psychiatric Technician*

**A**s of April 21st, 2022, recreational cannabis sale began for adults in New Jersey, making New Jersey one of 19 states permitting the sale for recreational use. Most Americans now live in a state where cannabis is legal, yet not much is known about the true medicinal benefits of cannabis. It is still considered a Schedule I narcotic by the Federal government. Emerging state legalization of cannabis has opened the door for scientific research, offering new insights into the potential benefits and risks associated with cannabis use. We feel you should be well informed on this controversial topic.

It is important to first understand how cannabis is handled in the body. Of the 100 cannabinoids found in cannabis, delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), and cannabidiol (CBD) are the most abundant. THC, which is the psychoactive cannabinoid that makes users feel

“high”, binds to cannabinoid receptors found on nearly every organ in the body. CBD does not bind to cannabinoid receptors directly, but its presence modulates the impact of THC on these receptors, while increasing the presence of anandamide, one of our body's many natural endocannabinoids. In psychopharmacological terms, THC is a full agonist of cannabinoid receptors, while CBD functions as a partial agonist, sometimes stimulating the receptor when there is no THC present, and sometimes inhibiting the receptor when too much THC is present in the synapse.

Endocannabinoids are similar to cannabinoids but are produced by our own bodies to modulate stress. The endocannabinoid system (ECS), which is found in every human and animal, is a complex cell signaling system consisting of cannabinoid receptors, endocannabinoids, and enzyme/transporters. The

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### How to Address Weight Gain Related to Psychiatric Medications

**P**sychediatric medications can be highly beneficial, and even lifesaving, but may result in unwanted weight gain. In particular, atypicals, like Abilify, Seroquel, and Vraylar, and mood stabilizers (not Lamotrigine) are most associated with the potential for increased appetite and weight gain. If you have any concerns about increased appetite or weight gain, always bring this to your clinician's attention; do not wait for the clinician to ask!

There are several recommendations your clinician may suggest to alleviate this problem. For example, your clinician may recommend switching to an alternative medication with less side effect of weight gain; or suggest the addition of an adjunct medication that may suppress your appetite. Alternatively, your clinician may recommend a non-pharmacologic intervention, such as nutrition and exercise. If a non-pharmacologic intervention is recommended, we can follow up with you so that you can achieve the desired result.

Source:

White, W., Elmore, L., Luthin, D., & Cates, M. (2013). Psychotropic-Induced Weight Gain: Review of Management Strategies. Consultant360. Retrieved June 20, 2022 from <https://www.consultant360.com/article/psychotropic-induced-weight-gain-review-management-strategies#:~:text=Management%20strategies%20to%20deal%20with,such%20as%20topiramate%20or%20metformin>

[https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families\\_and\\_Youth/Facts\\_for\\_Families/FFF-Guide/Preventing-and-Managing-Medication-Related-Weight-094.aspx](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Preventing-and-Managing-Medication-Related-Weight-094.aspx)

**CANNABIS** *continued from page 1*

primary goal of the ECS is to return the body to homeostasis, after it has been exposed to stress. In areas of the brain and body, endocannabinoids stimulate the release of neurotransmitters where they are needed, while decreasing release in areas where excess production occurs.

cannabis-like molecule, in the treatment of cannabis withdrawal, was shown to be beneficial. See the table below for further data on potential cannabis benefits and harm.

Recent and ongoing research suggests both potential benefit and harm related to cannabis use. Benefit versus harm

Potential Benefits	Potential Harm
Cannabis at a low dose can be calming, relaxing, & help with sleep.	Cannabis with high THC can increase anxiety, psychosis and hospitalization.
Cannabis can alleviate chronic pain, & allow an individual to cut back on opioid use.	Cannabis use in mother's during pregnancy may negatively affect the infant's development.
Cannabis can help with nausea and increase one's appetite.	Cannabis use in adolescents may result in the thickening of the cerebral cortex, and difficulty on memory tasks.
Cannabis use in individuals with PTSD can turn off the body's natural stress response by the endocannabinoid system.	Chronic cannabis use may lead to dependence, which can impair memory, mood, and motivation.
Highly potent CBD can slow brain waves in individuals with Autism, reducing impulsive behaviors. As well as individuals with Epilepsy, reducing number of seizures.	Discontinuation of cannabis in an individual with cannabis addiction can increase irritability, aggression, depression, insomnia, and poor appetite.

A recent research study showed significant benefit in individuals who used medical marijuana to treat various ailments including chronic pain, anxiety, insomnia, and PTSD. These researchers suspect restorative sleep induced by medical marijuana may have been the key to improvement in the subjects' physical and mental health. Scientists suspect that individuals with PTSD develop dysfunctional ECS as a result of long-term stress, and that use of cannabis in these individuals may serve to reactivate and restabilize the ECS.

High potency CBD has shown promise also in the treatment of epilepsy and autism. Currently, a double-blind study is being conducted to examine the effect of Epidiolex, the first FDA approved cannabis derived medication, in the treatment of severe autism. The study is still on going, but early findings seem promising. Researchers suspect high potent CBD is beneficial to individuals with epilepsy and autism by silencing overactivity in the brain; again, allowing these receptors to achieve homeostasis.

Research has also suggested potential harm from cannabis use. For example, findings suggest that continuous use of THC may reduce the number of cannabinoid receptors, leading to tolerance, and increased risk for cannabis dependence and addiction. Interestingly, research into anandamide, our body's natural

seems to depend on the individual and the level of use/potency. Ultimately, federal legalization will be required to conduct further research, and provide opportunities for the development of FDA approved cannabis products.

If you have any questions about how cannabis can be of benefit or detriment to your psychiatric care, please discuss with your PFCa clinician. If you are interested in learning more about cannabis research, click this link to watch the free NOVA Documentary "The Cannabis Question."

Source: NOVA. (2021, September 29). The Cannabis Question. Documentary. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/video/the-cannabis-question-82board/>

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT  
Psychiatric  
Medications &  
Summer Heat**

Now that Summer is here, we want to remind our patients to protect themselves from heat related illnesses while taking certain psychiatric medications. Visit this link to review a previous PFCa Wellness Update article outlining the risks and preventative measures. Enjoy the warmer weather and be safe!

Psych Meds & Summer Heat - PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATES, LLC RICARDO J. FERNANDEZ, MD ([drfernandez.org](mailto:drfernandez.org)).

**Call Us for  
Medication Refills**

**W**e have found that pharmacies are frequently requesting automated medication refills when patients are not aware, and/or the medication has previously been discontinued or the dose has changed. In order to be more efficient, we will *not* process refill requests solely on pharmacy automated request and ask that patients call our office **(609) 419-0123** directly if you need a refill. This way we can assure you are getting your prescribed regimen.

We try to process refill requests within 1 to 2 days, but certain medications (stimulants, benzodiazepens & sleep medicine) require the licensed clinician to ecribe them. For these medications, we ask that requests be made 3 to 5 days ahead of your last day of medications. We appreciate your patience as we try to manage the numerous refill requests in the most efficient manner.

**Medicare Open  
Enrollment & Part D**

**F**or 2023, Medicare's open enrollment is between October 15th until December 7th. During this time Medicare recipients have a choice to change their Part B (medical) and Part D (pharmacy) plans for the upcoming year. We have found that patients who are transitioning into Medicare are not aware that medications that they are already on may no longer be available to them on the new Medicare formulary or that the cost is too high. We urge you to review your medication list and compare them in the variety of pharmacy benefit plans offered by your current provider and competitors. Medicare recipients will soon be receiving offers in the mail. Do your research ahead of time to ensure you are getting the best plan for your medication needs.

Even patients with commercial pharmacy benefits need to review their plan benefits. Some plans have the pharmacy benefits tied into a high deductible such that plan members pay the negotiated plan rate for services and medications until the yearly deductible is met. Coupons and copay cards are available to offset the cost of medications for commercial plans but not for Medicare. A little research and planning can save you money. Our staff is always happy to assist with resources.