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Medical Marijuana Legalization and Increased Trend of Cannabis Poisonings in Thailand

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BACKGROUND: On the 19th February 2019, Thailand legalized medical marijuana. According to the Department of Medical Service (DMS), there are approved 4 indications: 1) nausea and vomiting in patients with chemotherapy, 2) neuropathic pain, 3) spasticity in multiple sclerosis patients, and 4) drug-resistant epilepsy.

OBJECTIVE: To describe characteristics and trends of cannabis poisoning reported to Ramathibodi Poison Center (RPC) before and after medical marijuana legalization in Thailand.

METHOD: This is a descriptive study of all cannabis poisonings reported to RPC during January 2018 to May 2019. Patient characteristics, clinical effects, treatments, reasons and scenarios of exposures were described.

RESULTS: During the study period there were 302 cannabis poisonings of which 187 were males (61.9%). The median age was 48 years. Exposed products included marijuana oil (79.5%), marijuana smoking (12.6%), edible product (4.3%), marijuana drink (1.3%), and others (2.3%). Number of reported cases per month were increasing from 2 cases in January 2018 to 15 cases in January 2019, and 92 cases in May 2019. Common clinical effects were tachycardia (44.0%), palpitation (36.4%), high blood pressure (36.4%), and dizziness (35.1%). Coma was reported in 4 cases (1.3%). Common treatments were intravenous fluid (46.7%), benzodiazepines (19.5%), and dimenhydrinate (15.6%). Nineteen cases (6.3%) underwent CT scan of brain. Four cases (1.3%) were intubated. No death was reported. Common reasons for using cannabis products were: for abuse (14.9%), sleep aid (14.9%), trying without any illness (12.6%), pain control (10.6%), cancer treatment (6.6%), food supplement (6.6%), cancer prevention (4.0%), and treatment of diabetes mellitus (4.0%). Only one case reported using marijuana oil for neuropathic pain. There was no other case reported reason of exposure related to DMS indication.

CONCLUSIONS: Trend of cannabis poisoning is increasing. The majority of the cases reported reasons that were not related to DMS indication.