

Nabilone for Non-chemotherapy-Associated Nausea and Weight Loss Due to Medical Conditions: A Review

Context

Cannabis has a long history of medicinal use — it has been used as a sedative, as a pain reliever, to prevent vomiting, and to stimulate appetite. Cannabinoids are the active ingredients in cannabis that produce these medicinal effects. Nabilone is a synthetic cannabinoid that is approved for use in Canada for the treatment of severe nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy in adults older than 18 years of age.

Technology

Nabilone works by affecting the part of the brain that regulates nausea and vomiting, appetite, movement, and pain. Therefore, nabilone has the potential for a number of off-label uses, two of which include the management of nausea and vomiting attributed to factors other than chemotherapy, and the management of weight loss due to medical conditions.

Issue

A review of the evidence on the clinical effectiveness and safety of nabilone for treating non-chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting and for managing weight loss attributed to medical conditions, as well as of the evidence-based guidelines, will help inform treatment decisions for these indications.

Methods

A limited literature search was conducted of key resources, and titles and abstracts of the retrieved

publications were reviewed. Full-text publications were evaluated for final article selection according to predetermined selection criteria (population, intervention, comparator, outcomes, and study designs).

Key Messages

- Nabilone may be effective for preventing nausea and vomiting following surgery, for treating intractable vomiting associated with HIV/AIDS, and for treating weight loss in patients with the hepatitis C virus undergoing treatment with interferon-ribavirin (based on low-quality evidence).
- No evidence-based guidelines were found on the use of nabilone for the treatment of non-chemotherapy-associated nausea and vomiting and for weight loss related to medical conditions.

Results

The literature search identified 266 citations, with 1 additional article identified from other sources. After screening the abstracts, 16 were deemed potentially relevant. Of these, 4 met the criteria for inclusion in this review: 1 randomized controlled study, 1 retrospective cohort study, and 2 case reports.

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