Medical cannabis eases seizures in childhood epilepsy

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Medicinal cannabis could offer patients significant relief from intractable epilepsy, but cost and access barriers remain, a review has found.

Cannabis-based medicinal products (CBMPs) can offer patients significant relief from intractable epilepsy, according to evidence from a small number of patients.

In a review of 10 cases of severe childhood-onset epilepsy, Imperial's Prof. David Nutt and Rayyan Zafar looked at the impact of combined CBD and THC-based products on the frequency of epileptic seizures.

They found carers reported a 97% reduction in monthly frequency of seizures when patients received whole plant extract cannabis treatments—not currently licensed in the UK—showing a clear benefit among this group. However, despite the clinical benefit, they cite the significant cost for their use and difficulty in accessing the treatments in the UK.

Zafar, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Brain Sciences, said: "Patients and their families deserve better, so we implore policy makers, regulators and public health bodies to prioritize the health of these individuals and help them to access in the NHS medicines which are making a dramatic improvement to their lives."

The full findings are published in *Drug Science, Policy and Law*.

More information: RR Zafar et al. Ending the pain of children with severe epilepsy? An audit of the impact of medical cannabis in 10 patients, *Drug Science, Policy and Law* (2020). DOI: 10.1177/2050324520974487

Provided by Imperial College London

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