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Safe-cannabis.com

info@drcarolinemaccallum.com

Twitter: @camacallum

Practical Strategies Using Medical Cannabis to Reduce Harms Associated With Long Term Opioid Use in Chronic Pain

*Caroline MacCallum, Lauren Eadie, Alasdair Barr, Michael Boivin, and Shaohua Lu
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- Cannabis and opioids have been reported to offer synergistic analgesic effects when used concomitantly: *Cannabis-Opioid Mutual Potentiation*
- There is preliminary but promising data to support that medical cannabis initiation can help reduce the opioid dose required to produce pain relief, or substitute the use of opioids altogether, which could help reduce the risk of fatal opioid-related overdose

Mirroring the approach of the 2017 Canadian Opioid Guidelines Clinical Tool, a clinical tool was developed as a clinical guideline for the initiation of medical cannabis in the management of Chronic Non-Cancer Pain (CNCP) patients using chronic opioid therapy

Findings: When low dose THC is introduced as an adjunctive therapy, we observe better pain control clinically with lower doses of opioids, improved pain-related outcomes and reduced opioid-related harm.

Proposed Steps for cannabis adjunct initiation trial with opioid therapy

Step 1—Assessment

Step 2—Starting cannabis at a low dose

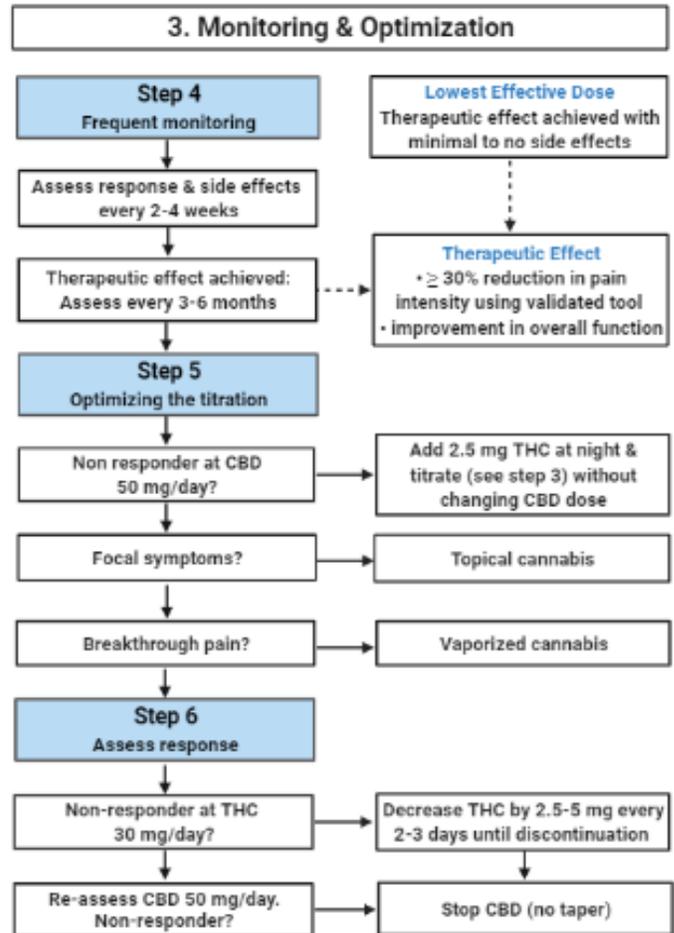
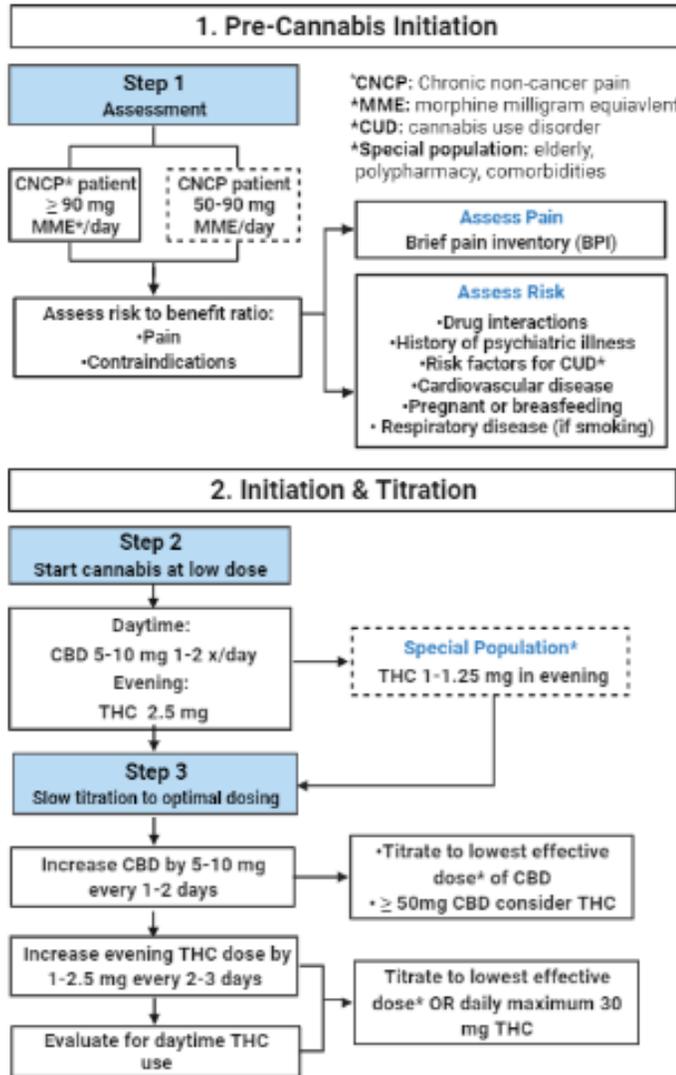
Step 3—Slow titration until optimal dose

Step 4—Frequent monitoring

Step 5—Optimizing the titration

Step 6—Consider stopping the trial and discontinuing cannabis (if no response)

Flowchart to facilitate medical cannabis use in CNCP patients prescribed high doses of opioids



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