How Does Marijuana Affect People With HIV?

A $3.2 million federal grant will fund the largest and most comprehensive study exploring this question.

November 2, 2017

Researchers at the University of Florida (UF) received a $3.2 million grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to explore the health effects of marijuana on people living with HIV. Topics to be examined include pot's influence on pain, the body, chronic inflammation, viral suppression, stress and sleep in addition to how often people use marijuana and how strong it is.

The five-year study will follow 400 HIV-positive Floridians who use marijuana; it is thought to be the largest and most comprehensive research on this topic, according to a UF Health press release. The study's lead investigator is Robert Cook, MD, MPH, a professor of epidemiology and medicine at UF Health.

"Marijuana use is increasingly common in persons living with HIV infection," said Cook in the press release. "Yet, past findings regarding the health impact of marijuana use on HIV have been limited and inconclusive. The long-term goal of this research is to provide patients, clinicians and public health authorities with information to guide clinical and safety recommendations for marijuana use."

Florida is a good location for the research. The state has the highest rate of new HIV cases and is ranked third in the country for the number of people living with the virus. What's more, the state's Amendment 2 granted Floridians with serious illnesses, including HIV, legal access to medical marijuana as of January 2017.

"Many persons using marijuana for specific health indications may have identified specific strategies to use marijuana that they find to be most effective, and we can learn from their experience," Cook said. "This information can help to inform clinical care and identify specific types and patterns of marijuana use to be studied in future randomized clinical trials."

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