No Correlation Between Medical Marijuana and Opioid Overdose Mortality, Study Finds

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A new study has revealed that there is no correlation between the accessibility of medical marijuana and the rate of opioid overdose mortality. While lawmakers and marijuana advocates have argued that legalizing weed to manage chronic pain can help reduce opioid addiction, researchers at Stanford University?s School of Medicine say that there doesn?t appear to be any connection between the two. Currently, 33 states and Washington, D.C., have fully legalized medical cannabis.

?If you think opening a bunch of dispensaries is going to reduce opioid deaths, you?ll be disappointed,? said Dr. Keith Humphreys, the study?s senior author. ?We don?t think cannabis is killing people, but we don?t think it?s saving people.?

A 2014 study by the University of Pennsylvania said there were on average 25 percent fewer opioid-related fatalities in states where medical marijuana is legal. At the time, only 13 states had legalized medical cannabis. It examined the rate of deaths caused by opioid overdoses between 1999 and 2010. The Stanford study challenges these findings.

The Stanford researchers examined CDC data on opioid overdose deaths from 1999 to 2017, similar to the approach used by University of Pennsylvania researchers. They found that opioid-related deaths in states with medical marijuana did decline from 1999 to 2010. However, when they analyzed overdose mortality rates up to 2017, they found that opioid deaths were actually higher in states with legal medical marijuana. At this point, more states had legalized medical cannabis.

The study found that from 1999 to 2017, there was actually a 22.7 percent increase in opioid-related deaths in states where medical marijuana was legal.

?We find it unlikely that medical cannabis?used by about 2.5% of the U.S. population?has exerted large conflicting effects on opioid overdose mortality,? the study authors wrote. The researchers said that after the study from Pennsylvania was released, pro-marijuana public officials and advocates used the findings as an argument in favor of legalization of medical cannabis.

Humphreys said that the findings are not ?about the cannabis?. He said that lower opioid death rates in the early days of legalization can be attributed to specific policies and conditions in those states. He said that the states that legalized medical marijuana earlier were wealthier and had greater access to treatments such as Naloxone, a drug that can potentially save lives by treating opioid overdoses.

Humphreys also said that those states imprison fewer people for drug use, meaning there is a smaller chance of an inmate getting out of jail and overdosing on opioids because their body had grown unaccustomed to the drug during their sentence.

The researchers said that there are still benefits to medical marijuana despite the drug?s inability to reduce opioid overdose deaths.

?There are valid reasons to pursue medical cannabis policies, but this doesn?t seem to be one of them,? said Dr. Chelsea Shover, lead author of the study. She encouraged researchers and politicians to seek other ways to tackle the opioid epidemic.

An answer to the opioid crisis is desperately needed. Every day, over 130 Americans die because of the opioid epidemic. Click the link to see Milwaukee's top rehab placement programs.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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