

Mental health benefits of cannabis still uncertain, says psychologist

There's not enough evidence or research on cannabis' effects, but legalization opens up new possibilities

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While the recent legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada might have some people reaching for a joint to ease symptoms of depression or anxiety, there's not enough research to prove it will help.

People wanting to use their recreational cannabis as medicine may want to think twice, according to clinical psychologist and Dalhousie University professor Dr. Simon Sherry.

While the recent legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada might have some people reaching for a joint to ease symptoms of depression or anxiety, Sherry says there's not enough research to prove it will help.

"What you see especially in the mental health area is that there's a lot of unfounded claims when it comes to cannabis," he said.

"We just don't have the evidence there. In fact, often times we have evidence that's contrary to that. For example there's pretty credible evidence that cannabis can make your anxiety and your depression worse, or even be a trigger for suicidal thinking," he told NEWS 95.7's Sheldon MacLeod.

Sherry says some people see medical marijuana as an oxymoron; two words that shouldn't go together. He says there just hasn't been enough rigorous tests and trials to make it viable for medicinal use.

"I think when we approach the idea of medical cannabis, we want to do so with a lot of caution. There's not a lot of sound, scientific evidence at this point," he said.

There are a few pockets of credible information and evidence though, he points out.

"For example, it seems like its helpful when it comes to chronic pain," he said.

He warns people not to jump to broad conclusions when reading information like this. Not all cannabis treats all pain, he explains.

"So its not so much you'd want to go home and smoke a joint with a lot of THC in it," he explained. "These studies are showing something else: that the CBD aspect may be helpful."

While the data might suggest its helpful, it's not any more helpful than other interventions available, says Sherry.

Cannabis has also been found to be helpful in reducing nausea in chemotherapy patients, as well as with some MS symptoms, but there is still a lot more research to be done.

"There's been a lot of handcuffs put on researchers for a long time because cannabis was illegal, and now we're going to see an explosion in research and knowledge gained with legalization," he said.