

By OSBN Advanced Practice Policy Analyst *Sarah Wickenhagen*, DNP, RN, FNP



THE ROLE OF NURSES DISCUSSING MARIJUANA AND SUBSTANCE USE DURING HEALTHCARE VISITS

In recent years, the prevalence of openly using marijuana has increased significantly in many parts of the world, driven by changing attitudes and evolving legislation. The trend toward openness regarding marijuana use is particularly pronounced in regions where the substance has been legalized for both medicinal and recreational purposes. This shift in societal acceptance is reflected in various aspects of culture, from popular media to public discourse.

In the United States, for example, the legalization of recreational marijuana in several states, including Colorado, California, and Oregon, has normalized its use among adults. As a result, it's not uncommon to see individuals openly consuming marijuana products in public places like designated smoking areas or even cannabis lounges. The growing

prevalence of marijuana dispensaries and online platforms for purchasing cannabis products has made access more convenient, contributing to its increased visibility.

In addition to recreational use, medical marijuana has gained acceptance as a legitimate form of treatment for various medical conditions, such as chronic pain, epilepsy, and anxiety. Clients who use medical marijuana may openly discuss their treatment plans with healthcare providers, contributing to the destigmatization of marijuana use for therapeutic purposes.

It's important to note that while the prevalence of openly using marijuana has grown, there are still regional and cultural variations in acceptance. Employers and health systems may differ in their approval of its after-hours use, and the legal status of marijuana varies widely from place to

place. Public attitudes and regulations surrounding marijuana use continue to evolve, and ongoing research and discussions play a crucial role in shaping policies and perceptions related to this substance.

As these changes occur, nurses play a vital role in discussing and addressing clients' marijuana and substance use during healthcare visits. Open and non-judgmental conversations about these topics can contribute to better client care and outcomes. This article explores the responsibilities and challenges faced by nurses in addressing marijuana and substance use, emphasizing the importance of effective communication and client-centered care.

Understanding the Landscape

The evolving legal status of marijuana in various states and countries has led to

continued on page 16 >>

NURSING PRACTICE

increased access and consumption, both for medicinal and recreational purposes. Furthermore, the opioid epidemic and the misuse of prescription drugs underscore the importance of discussing substance use with clients. Healthcare providers must stay informed about the legal, medical, and social aspects of marijuana and substance use to provide comprehensive care.

The Role of Nurses

1. **Assessing Use and Risk Factors:** Nurses should routinely ask about clients' marijuana and substance use. This information can be crucial in assessing health risks, identifying potential interactions with medications, and tailoring treatment plans. Providers must use non-judgmental and empathetic communication to encourage clients to be honest about their use.
2. **Providing Education:** Nurses should be prepared to educate clients about the

potential benefits and risks associated with marijuana and other substances. Evidence-based information can help clients make informed decisions about their use, reduce harm, and promote safe consumption. Screening for Dependence and Addiction: Nurses and providers should be trained in recognizing signs of dependence and addiction. Identifying clients who may require specialized treatment or interventions is essential in preventing further harm.

3. **Incorporating Harm Reduction Strategies:** Encouraging harm reduction strategies is crucial, especially for clients who continue to use substances despite potential risks. Nurses can offer guidance on safer consumption methods, dosage control, and reducing the risk of adverse effects.
4. **Referral and Collaboration:** In cases where clients require specialized substance use disorder treatment

or counseling, nurses and providers should facilitate referrals to addiction specialists or support groups. Collaboration with addiction medicine professionals can ensure comprehensive care for clients with substance use issues.

Challenges in Addressing Marijuana and Substance Use

Addressing marijuana and substance use during medical visits can be challenging due to several factors:

1. **Stigma:** Stigmatization of substance use can make clients hesitant to disclose their habits. Nurses must create a safe and non-judgmental environment to encourage open communication.
2. **Legal Variability:** The legal status of marijuana varies widely across regions, leading to confusion and uncertainty for both clients and providers. Healthcare professionals must navigate this complex landscape with caution.
3. **Limited Research:** The scientific understanding of marijuana and other substances is still evolving. Nurses should stay up to date with the latest research to provide evidence-based guidance to their clients.
4. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Providers should be culturally sensitive when discussing substance use, as attitudes and beliefs about these substances can vary significantly among different populations.

Oregon's Medical Marijuana Program

The Oregon Medical Marijuana Program (OMMP) is a state-run initiative that provides qualifying clients access to medical marijuana for the treatment of various debilitating medical conditions. Established in 1998, Oregon was one of the pioneering states in the United States to legalize medical cannabis. The program is administered by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and operates under their rules and guidelines and therefore not addressed in the Oregon Nurse Practice Act.

To be eligible for the OMMP, clients must



Big enough to count, small enough to care.

Join our dynamic team of change-makers and experience a more rewarding career.

What makes Salem Health special?

- Market-leading compensation, including excellent shift differentials
- Relocation assistance available for qualified candidates
- Comprehensive benefits plus special perks and discounts
- Magnet®-designated, state-of-the-art facility
- Largest hospital in the State of Oregon by bed count
- Always hiring associate or bachelors prepared nurses



Learn more and apply today at salemhealth.org/careers or email my.recruiter@salemhealth.org



have a qualifying medical condition, such as cancer, chronic pain, epilepsy, HIV/AIDS, or glaucoma, among others. Clients must obtain a recommendation from a qualified healthcare provider, such as a physician or nurse practitioner, who attests to the medical necessity of using marijuana for their condition. Once approved, clients can register with the OMMP to receive a medical marijuana card, which grants them legal protection for possessing and using medical cannabis.

The Oregon Medical Marijuana Program has been subject to updates and amendments over the years to adapt to changing regulations and policies. It is essential for clients and caregivers participating in the program to stay informed about the latest developments to ensure compliance with the law.

Conclusion

Oregon nurses play a pivotal role in addressing marijuana and substance use during medical visits. Open and non-

judgmental communication, coupled with education and support, can help clients make informed decisions about their use and reduce potential health risks. By embracing their responsibilities in assessing, educating, and referring clients, nurses can contribute to improved client outcomes and the promotion of safer and healthier behaviors.

References:

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2021). Marijuana. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/marijuana>
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2021). Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT). <https://www.samhsa.gov/sbirt>
3. The American Nurses Association. (2018). Position Statement: The Opioid Epidemic. <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nursing-excellence/official-position-statements/id/the-opioid-epidemic/> National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2020).

Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide (Third Edition). <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-drug-addiction-treatment-research-based-guide-third-edition>

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Understanding the Epidemic. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/index.html>
5. Oregon Medical Marijuana Program. (n.d.). Oregon Health Authority. <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/PH/DISEASES/CONDITIONS/CHRONIC/DISEASE/MEDICALMARIJUANAPROGRAM/Pages/index.aspx>
6. Oregon Medical Marijuana Act. (n.d.). Oregon Revised Statutes Chapter 475B. https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws/ors/ors475B.html



Exceptional Rural Healthcare



Further your career at the most diverse & inclusive hospitals in Washington state.*

We are looking for committed and compassionate CNAs, LPNs, and RNs to provide care for our patients at Astria Sunnyside Hospital, Astria Toppenish Hospital, and Inpatient Behavioral Health.

We offer a market competitive salary and benefits package; a sign-on bonus; relocation reimbursement; and a positive and supportive work environment.

We invite you to learn more.

Call our Talent Acquisition Team at 509.837.1633 or browse opportunities online at www.astria.health.

* The Low Institute is a national think tank organization that focuses on the social responsibility of hospitals throughout the U.S. The Institute ranked Astria Toppenish Hospital as the #1 Racially Inclusive Hospital and #5 for Health Equity in Washington, and Astria Sunnyside Hospital as the #2 Racially Inclusive Hospital in Washington.