Mental health nurses and clinicians key to reducing recreational cannabis harm

DARWIN, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA, October 18, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Harm caused by recreational cannabis could be reduced if mental health nurses are better equipped with information on the risks and benefits of the substance, according to a joint study with Charles Darwin University (CDU).

The study with CDU and Chiang Mai University in Thailand examined literature on the medicinal benefits of cannabis, the negative mental health impacts associated with legalising recreational use and strategies to minimise these harms.

The study by Charles Darwin University and Chiang Mai University in Thailand highlighted the growing need for nurses and other mental health clinicians to be informed about the risks and benefits of recreational cannabis use.

Corresponding author and CDU Professor in Mental Health Dan Bressington said as more countries move to legalise recreational cannabis, it was crucial for nurses and mental health clinicians to have the knowledge and resources to support patients using or exploring the substance.

"We found that legalisation of recreational cannabis use is likely to result in some deleterious effects on mental health, particularly for vulnerable groups such as adolescents, people with an existing severe mental illness and those with a family history of mental illnesses," Professor Bressington said.

"However, based on the current evidence we should not expect dramatic changes in the volume of cannabis-related presentations to emergency departments and major increases in healthcare costs in the general population.

"Our review highlighted several key messages that mental health clinicians should aim to convey when working as a mental health educator, including not using it frequently, avoiding cannabis

sativa strains with high potency THC content and not experimenting with cannabis until after 21 years old.

"We also propose several risk-reduction strategies on a population level, including regulatory and financial measures, the provision of tailored education and information health promotion programs, screening approaches, specialist treatment services and research and evaluation."

On medical benefits of cannabis, Professor Bressington said there was strong evidence of efficacy in epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, and inflammatory bowel disorders.

Professor Bressington said the authors pursued the study after the sudden relaxation of Thailand's cannabis use laws in 2022, following the legalisation of cannabis for medical use in 2018.

"The change in legislation has triggered a great deal of debate about the risks and potential benefits of cannabis legalisation, both within Thailand and internationally," Professor Bressington said.

"Concerns generally relate to fears that more availability will result in increased frequency of use and a negative impact on mental health.

"As nurses and mental health clinicians we wanted to find out what impact cannabis legalisation may have on mental health in Thailand based on the evidence from other countries that have legalised recreational use.

"We need to help people make informed choices about their health behaviours and therefore collated relevant evidence that healthcare professionals may find useful if they are working with people that consume cannabis recreationally."

The study was published in the [Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing.](#)

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