The role of cannabinoids in the treatment of cancer

Vecera L1,2, Gabrhelik T3, Prasil P4, Stourac P2

Department of Emergency Medicine, The Tomas Bata Hospital in Zlin, Zlin, Czech Republic.
Tomas.Gabrhelik@bnzlin.cz

ABSTRACT

AIM: The aim of this review article is to summarize current knowledge about the role of cannabinoids and cannabinoid receptors in tumor disease modulation and to evaluate comprehensively the use of cannabinoids in cancer patients.

METHOD: According to the PRISMA protocol, we have included data from a total of 105 articles.

RESULTS: Cannabinoids affect cancer progression by three mechanisms. The most important mechanism is the stimulation of autophagy and affecting the signaling pathways leading to apoptosis. The most important mechanism of this process is the accumulation of ceramide. Cannabinoids also stimulate apoptosis by mechanisms independent of autophagy. Other mechanisms by which cannabinoids affect tumor growth are inhibition of tumor angiogenesis, invasiveness, metastasis, and the modulation of the anti-tumor immune response.

CONCLUSION: In addition to the symptomatic therapy of cancer patients, the antitumor effects of cannabinoids (whether in monotherapy or in combination with other cancer therapies) have promising potential in the treatment of cancer patients. More clinical trials are needed to demonstrate the antitumor effect of cannabinoids (Tab. 1, Fig. 1, Ref. 167). Text in PDF www.elis.sk.

KEY WORDS: cannabinoids, cannabinoid receptor, cancer, oncological diseases, cancer treatment.

Abbreviations: ∆9-THC (Δ9-Tetrahydrocannabinol), 2-AG (2-arachidonoylglycerol), ACPA (Arachidonoyl cyclopropamide), AEA (Anandamide), AKT (Protein kinase B), ALK (Anaplastic lymphoma kinase), AMPK (Adenosine monophosphate-activated protein kinase), Ang-2 (Angiopoietin 2), ATF-4 (Activating transcription factor 4), BAK (Bel-2 homologous antagonist/killer), BAX (Bel-2-like protein 4), Bel-2 (B-cell lymphoma 2), BID (BH3-interacting-domain death agonist), CaMKKβ (Calcium/calmodulin-dependent protein kinase 2β), cAMP (Cyclic adenosine monophosphate), CB1 and CB2 (Cannabinoid receptor 1 and 2), CBD (Cannabidiol), cdc42 (Cell division control protein 42 homolog), Cdk (Cyclin-dependent kinase), CHOP (CAAT/enhance-binding protein-homologous protein), JNK/c-jun (c-jun N-terminal kinase), COX-2 (Cyclooxygenase 2), CXCL12, 16 (Chemokine ligand 12, 16), CXCR4 (Chemokine receptor 4), DR (Death receptors), EGF (Epidermal growth factor), EGFR (Epidermal growth factor receptor), eIF2α (Eukaryotic translation initiation factor 2α), EMT (Epithelial-mesenchymal transition), ER (Endoplasmic reticulum stress responses), ERK (Extracellular signal-regulated kinases), ET-1 (Endothelin 1), FAAH (Fatty acid amide hydrolase), FADD (Fas-associated protein with death domain), FAK (Focal adhesion kinase), FOXO (Forkhead box O), GEFs (Guanine nucleotide exchange factors), Gi protein (Adenylate cyclase inhibitor), GPR55 (G protein-coupled receptor 55), HMG-CoA (3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl-coenzyme A), ICAM-1 (Intercellular adhesion molecule 1), ID1 (DNA-binding protein inhibitor), IFN-γ (Interferon gamma), IL-2, 4, 6, 8, 10 (Interleukin 2, 4, 6, 8, 10), IP, (Inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate), LAK (Lymphokine-activated killer), LOX (Lipoxygenase), MAGL (Monoacylglycerol lipase), MAP kinase (Mitogen-activated protein kinase), MDK (Midkine), MDSC (Myeloid-derived suppressor cells), MEK (Mitogen-activated protein kinase), MMP 2 a 9 (Matrix-metalloproteinase 2 a 9), mTOR (Mechanistic/mammalian target of rapamycin), mTORC1 a 2 (mTOR complex 1 a 2), NAGly (N-arachidonoyl glycine), NFXb (Nuclear factor kB), OEA (Oleoylethanolamide), p8 (or NUPR1 (Nuclear protein-1), or Com1 (Candidate of metastasis-1), p21 (Cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor 1), p27 (Cyclin-dependent kinase inhibitor 1B), p38 (p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase), PCNA (Proliferating cell nuclear antigen), PDGF-AA (Platelet-derived growth factor), P13K (Phosphatidylinositol 3-kinase), PIGF (Placental growth factor), PKA (Protein kinase A), PKB/AKT (Protein kinase B), PKC (Protein kinase C), PLC (Phospholipase C), PPARs (Peroxisome proliferator-activated receptors), rac1...
Introduction

The term cannabinoids includes three groups of substances. Natural phytocannabinoids, cannabis-derived substances (especially Δ9-THC a CBD), synthetically prepared analogs and endocannabinoids anandamide (AEA) (1) and 2-arachidonoylglycerol (2-AG) (2, 3) which are naturally found in the human body. Cannabinoids have a different affinity and intrinsic activity for cannabinoid and potential cannabinoid receptors. Therefore different cannabinoids may have another clinical effect. In the treatment of an oncologically ill patient, cannabinoids are used primarily for symptomatic treatment (pain, nausea, vomiting, and anorexia) (7). In the pain management, cannabinoids are effective for chronic neuropathic pain (7), their synergistic effect with opioids is assumed (8), although they do not appear to have any effect on the treatment of acute pain (9). Recently, we have seen publications that consider the direct antitumor effect of cannabinoids and the involvement of cannabinoid receptors in curative therapy of an oncologically ill patient. Anti-proliferative, anti-metastatic, antiangiogenic, and proapoptotic effects of cannabinoids are considered (7). In this review article, we will focus on the role of cannabinoids as anti-tumor agents. Symptomatic treatment and pain management will be mentioned too. In our article, we evaluate in detail the effect of cannabinoids on all the receptors they can influence. Table 1 provides a complete list of studies published so far on this topic.

Materials and methods

The search algorithm proceeded according to the PRISMA protocol. In the Pubmed.org database, 980 citations were initially identified. The search terms strings was “Cannabinoid AND cancer” and “Cannabinoid AND tumor.” We found 177 citations related to the topic. After excluding duplicates (n = 32), articles that were not in English (n = 6), and articles without full text (n = 34), a total of 105 full-text articles were included. Of these, nineteen articles were systematic reviews, eighty-five articles were animal or cell culture studies, and only one article was a clinical trial. The search diagram is shown in Figure 1.

Results

Cannabinoid receptors

Since the 1990s, two types of cannabinoid receptors, CB1 and CB2 (4, 5), have been known, and other receptors (TRPV1, PPARs, GPR55, GPR119, and GPR18) have been identified as potential cannabinoid receptors (6, 10, 11). Both cannabinoid receptors are associated with G proteins. The CB1 receptor is mainly found in the nerve tissue, while the CB2 receptor is mainly found on immune cells (12). The endocannabinoid system plays an important regulatory role in the secretion of hormones, reproductive functions, and stress reactions (13). The metabolism of endocannabinoids, ligands of cannabinoid receptor, is mainly mediated by lipase hydrolysis. AEA hydrolyzes FAAH (14) primarily, 2-AG hydrolyzes MAGL (15). CB1 receptors are mainly found on central and peripheral nervous system cells, and their function is primarily in inhibiting the release of neurotransmitters. It can also be found on pituitary cells, reproductive organs, and immune cells. This receptor is a heterodimer linked to Gs protein. Upon activation of the CB1 receptor, inhibition of adenylate cyclase and decrease of intracellular concentration of cAMP results in an increase in the activity of the regulatory mechanisms that belong to the MAP kinase cascade (16). Rarely, the CB1 receptor may be associated with a G protein, which in turn increases the activity of adenylate cyclase (12). Reduction of cAMP directly works by reducing the potassium influx via K+ channel and increased calcium efflux through the N and P/Q Ca2+ channel. Further reactions occur by activating PKA and PKC. Activated PKA affects the decrease in potassium efflux in the K+ channel. PKC directly phosphorylates the CB1 receptor causing dissociation of the receptor from the ion channels (K+ and Na+ and P/Q type Ca2+), which leads to the reduction in the direct effect of CB1 on these channels (negative feedback). Another mechanism is the activation of intracellular signal kinases belonging to a large family of MAP kinase cascades (Ras/Raf-1/MEK/ERK, FAK, p38, c-Jun) (13). These intracellular signal kinases play an important role in cell differentiation, proliferation, and cell death (16). The last mechanism is the inhibition of the PI3K/AKT/mTOR pathway – a very important pathway that promotes cell growth and inhibits apoptosis (17) by stimulating growth factors.

Unlike the CB1 receptor, CB2 receptors are found primarily on cells of the immune system. CB2 receptors have been found on all cells of the immune system. Only in neutrophils, there is an unclear consensus on whether they express CB2 receptors (18). Furthermore, CB2 receptors are expressed on tonsils, spleen, and thymus. Further, CB2 receptors have been found on pancreatic, renal, uterine, and genital cells (18). CB2 receptors are primarily involved in the modulation of the inflammatory response and cytokine release (12, 18). Although CB2 receptors are functionally similar to CB1 receptors, there are some differences between the two. The activation of CB2 receptors leads to four basic cellular processes. The basal pathway, as with the CB1 receptors, is associated with the G protein and the adenylate cyclase activity is reduced. It is followed by ERK activation of the MAP kinase, which is probably mediated by PKC (19). CB2 receptor agonists increase the release of Ca2+ from the endoplasmic reticulum and
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increase the mitochondrial Ca\(^{2+}\) via the PLC-IP3 signaling pathway. This leads to an increase in intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) concentration (20). Unlike CB1 receptors, it appears that CB2 receptors are not associated with potassium channels, which is probably the most important difference between the two receptors causing them to be functionally different (18). It is very interesting that the two main endocannabinoids, i.e. 2-AG and AEA, evoke distinct functions after binding to the CB2 receptor. After the 2-AG binding, a pro-inflammatory response (increased recruitment, migration, adhesion of leukocytes, the release of chemokines) occurs. On the other hand, binding of AEA to CB2 receptor results in an anti-inflammatory response (reduced release of proinflammatory cytokines, increased production of anti-inflammatory IL-10, reduced nitric oxide production) (18).

Another potential cannabinoid receptor is GPR55 (10, 11). GPR55 is associated with the G13 protein (guanine nucleotide-binding protein alpha 13). It is considered that GPR55 will be included in the cannabinoid receptor family and will be named CB3 (21). This G-protein regulates cellular processes via GEFs, a protein that activates GTPases. The activation occurs by GEFs changing GTPs to GDPs on the GTPase. Activated GTPase coupled GTP is prepared to phosphorylate various cellular signaling pathways (22).

The G\(_1\), subtype is essential for inducing the migration of fibroblasts and endothelial cells (23). Activation of GPR55 leads to stimulation of rhoA, cdc42, and rac1 (24). It is important that all three of the aforementioned proteins (rhoA, cdc42, and rac1) are included in signal cascades regulating cell division, cell growth and migration, and thus all three may play a role in the progression of an oncological disease (25, 26, 27). In addition to GPR55, there is a large number of G-protein coupled receptors that potentially can be activated by cannabinoids (6). The most important of these receptors are GPR119 and GPR18. GPR119 is a receptor that occurs primarily in cells of the gastrointestinal tract and pancreas. GPR119 is an important receptor in the regulation of insulin secretion and energy balance (6, 10). Its association with the endocannabinoid system is considered because OEA, a potential endocannabinoid, has an affinity for GPR119 (28). However, its involvement in the endocannabinoid system is highly questioned (6). GPR18 is considered to be an abnormal cannabinoid receptor regulating the migration and proliferation of microglia. This effect is mediated through NAGly (11).

An interesting group of receptors potentially belonging to the family of endocannabinoid receptors is a large superfamily TRP (6). These are non-selective cation channels including the six subgroups: “canonical,” “vanilloid (TRPV),” “melastatin (TRPM),” “polycystin,” “mucolipin”, and “ankyrin (TRPA).” These receptors are involved in the transmission of a number of stimuli – temperature, light, taste and olfactory stimuli, mechanical stimuli, osmotic stimuli (29). Currently, several receptors from this so-called superfamiley are considered, which could be part of the endocannabinoid system – TRPV1, TRPV2, TRPV4, TRPM8, and TRPA1 (6). The most important of these groups is TRPV1, a capsaicin receptor. This non-selective cation channel, which (for example) regulates the intracellular Ca\(^{2+}\) movement and its release from the

Fig. 1. Data search diagram.
| Author (year)                        | Type of tumor (model type) | Cannabinoids | Dose/Concentration (route) | Findings                                                                 | Ref.  |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Hohmann T et al (2015)              | Glioma                    | JWH-133      | AEA                       | Not specified, Influenced migratory and mechanical properties of tumor.   | 113   |
| Salazar M et al (2009)              | Glioma (cell culture)     | Δ9-THC       | 6 μM                      | Induced tumor cell death, stimulated autophagy. Induced ceramide accu-     | 114   |
| Ivanov VN et al (2017)              | Glioma (cell culture)     | CBD          | 5 to 20 μM                | Enhanced radiation-induced tumor death. Induced apoptosis. Differential   | 115   |
| Hernán Pérez de la Ossa D et al (2013) | Glioma (animal)         | Δ9-THC       | CBD                       | Enhanced apoptosis and decreased cell proliferation and angiogenesis.     | 116   |
| Sánchez C et al (2001)              | Glioma (animal)           | JWH-133      | WIN-55, 212-2             | Decreased tumor size. Increased tumor cell apoptosis, increased ceramide   | 117   |
| Blázquez C et al (2004)             | Glioma (animal)           | Δ9-THC       | WIN-55, 212-2             | Inhibited tumor cell growth and invasion. Induced apoptosis, impaired-     | 93    |
| Galve-Roperh I et al (2000)         | Glioma (animal)           | Δ9-THC       | WIN-55, 212-2             | Induced tumor regression, apoptosis. Activated Raf1 signal pathway,        | 63    |
| Gurley SN et al (2012)              | Glioma (animal)           | KM-233       | 2 mg/kg/2xday (i.p.)      | Reduced tumor size, decreased tumor growth.                               | 118   |
| Torres S et al (2011)               | Glioma (animal)           | Δ9-THC       | CBD                       | Induced tumor cell death, enhanced autophagy. In combination with te-      | 107   |
| Massi P et al (2004)                | Glioma (animal)           | CBD          | 0.5 mg/day (p.t.)         | Inhibited tumor growth, induced apoptosis.                               | 119   |
| Blázquez C et al (2003)             | Glioma (animal)           | JWH-133      | 50 μg/day (i.t.)          | Decreased tumor size, depressed the VEGF pathway. Effect abrogated by    | 97    |
| Agudo T et al (2007)                | Glioma (animal)           | CBD          | 15 mg/kg (i.p.)           | Decreased tumor size.                                                    | 120   |
| Singer E et al (2015)               | Glioma (animal)           | CBD          | 15 mg/kg (i.p.)           | Inhibited tumor cell survival. Increased reactive oxygen species. Inhibited | 121   |
| Scott KA et al (2014)               | Glioma (animal and cell culture) | Δ9-THC | An: 2 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 0.1 to 100 μM | Decreased tumor volume. Increased tumor radiosensitivity, autophagy and apoptosis. | 123   |
| Carracedo A et al (2006)            | Glioma (cell culture)     | Δ9-THC       | 0 to 3 μM                 | Inhibited tumor growth. Upregulated p8/TF4/CHOP/TRB3 pathway.            | 65    |
| Massi P et al (2008)                | Glioma (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Ani: 0.5 mg/day Cell: 10 to 16 μM | Reduced tumor growth. Decreased the activity and content of LOX. Stimulated FAAH. | 70    |
| Martínez-Martínez E et al (2015)    | Colon cancer (samples from patients) | JWH-133 | 10 μmol/L                | Upregulated CB2 receptor in cancer. CB2 mRNA expression in tumor tissue is a poor prognostic factor. | 124   |
| Author (year)                  | Type of tumor (model type)                  | Cannabinoids | Dose/Concentration (route)                      | Findings                                                                 | Ref. |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Martínez-Martínez E et al (2016) | Colon cancer (animal and cell culture)      | JWH-133      | Anim: 1 mg/kg/day and 5 mg/kg/day Cell: 0.1 to 10 μM | Low doses increased cell proliferation rate. Activated AKT/PKB pathway. High doses do not trigger apoptosis. | 125  |
| Cianchi F et al (2008)         | Colon cancer (animal, cell culture and samples from patients) | CB13 AEA     | Anim: 2.5 mg/kg/day Cell: 0.1 μM 0.1 μM | Induced tumor cell apoptosis, increased ceramide level. | 60   |
| Aviello G et al (2012)         | Colon cancer (animal)                        | CBD          | 5 mg/kg/3 x week (i.p.)                       | Reduced tumor cell proliferation. Reduced aberrant crypt foci, polyps and tumors. Reduced preneoplastic lesions, polyps and tumor growth. | 126  |
| Romano B et al (2014)          | Colon cancer (animal)                        | Cannabis sativa extract with high content CBD | 5 mg/kg (i.p.) | Reduced tumor cell proliferation. Reduced preneoplastic lesions, polyps and tumour growth. | 127  |
| Borrelli F et al (2014)        | Colon cancer (animal)                        | CBG          | 3 to 10 mg/kg (i.p.)                         | Inhibited tumor growth. Promoted apoptosis, stimulated ROS production, upregulated CHOP mRNA. | 128  |
| Kogan NM et al (2006)          | Colon cancer (animal and cell culture)       | HU-331       | Anim: 5 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 0 to 300 nM | Inhibited angiogenesis. Induced apoptosis of vascular endothelial cells. | 129  |
| Kogan NM et al (2007)          | Colon cancer (animal)                        | HU-331       | 5 to 7.5 mg/kg (i.p.) | Reduced tumor growth. More potent and less toxic than doxorubicin | 130  |
| Kargl J et al (2013)           | Colon cancer (animal and cell culture)       | O-1602       | Anim: 3 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 0.1 to 10 μM | Reduced tumor area and incidence. Decreased viability and induced apoptosis. Decreased the levels of PCNA, STAT3, NFκB, TNF-α. Increased p23 and BAX. | 131  |
| Sreevalsan S et al (2011)      | Prostate cancer Colon cancer (cell culture)  | WIN-55, 212-2| 5 to 1.5 μM 2.5 to 7.5 μM | Inhibited tumor growth. Induced phosphatase-dependent apoptosis. | 132  |
| Gustafsson SB et al (2009)     | Colon cancer (cell culture)                  | HU-210       | AEA NAGly                                      | Synergistic effect with 5-fluorouracil. Increased tumor cytotoxicity. Decreased tumor proliferation. | 111  |
| Athanasiou A et al (2007)      | Lung cancer (cell culture)                   | AEA Δ9-THC   | 0 to 200 μM 0 to 200 μM 0 to 200 μM | Morphological changes characteristic of apoptosis. | 133  |
| Haustein M et al (2014)        | Lung cancer (cell culture)                   | CBD Δ9-THC   | 0 to 3 μM 0 to 3 μM                           | Increased cancer cell susceptibility to LAK cell-mediated cytolysis. Upregulation of ICAM-1. | 105  |
| Preet A et al (2008)           | Lung cancer (cell culture)                   | Δ9-THC       | 1 to 20 μM                                    | Inhibited tumor cell growth, chemotaxis and chemoinvasion. Inhibited EGF-induced phosphorylation of ERK, JNK and AKT. | 134  |
| Preet A et al (2011)           | Non-small cell lung cancer (animal and cell culture) | JWH-015 WIN-55, 212-2 | Anim: 1mg/kg/day (p.t.) Cell: 1 to 20 μM JWH-015 Anim: 0,1 mg/kg/day (p.t.) Cell: 1 to 20 μM | Induced apoptosis. Inhibited migration. Inhibited phosphorylation of AKT. Reduced MMP-9 expression and activity. | 135  |
| Ramer R et al (2013)           | Lung cancer (cell culture)                   | CBD AM251 AM630 | 3 μM 1 μM 1 μM | Induced apoptosis. Upregulated COX-2 and PPAR-γ. | 88   |
| Ravi J et al (2014)            | Non-small cell lung cancer (cell culture)    | AEA          | 10 μM                                         | Reduced proliferative and chemotactic activities in combination with FAAH inhibitor. Downregulated EGF/EGFR pathway. | 83   |
| Author (year) | Type of tumor (model type) | Cannabinoids | Dose/Concentration (route) | Findings | Ref. |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|----------|-----|
| Ravi J et al (2016) | Non-smal cell lung cancer (animal and cell culture) | JWH-015, SR144528 | Anim: 7.5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 5 μM, SR144528 | Blocked tumor growth, inhibited macrophage recruitment and EMT. Downregulated EGF/EGFR pathway. Decreased migration and invasivity. Reduced expression of FAK, VCAM1, and MMP2. | 84 |
| Vidinský B et al (2012) | Non-small cell lung cancer (cell culture) | JWH-133 | 0 to 100 μM | Inhibited angiogenesis, endothelial cell migration, MMP-2 secretion. Induced weak DNA fragmentation. | 136 |
| Ramer R et al (2010) | Lung cancer (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Anim: 5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 0 to 3 μM | Inhibition tumor invasion. Decreased expression and secretion of SerpinE1/PAI1. | 96, 96 |
| Ramer R et al (2010) | Lung cancer (cervical cancer (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Anim: 5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 0 to 3 μM | Decrease tumor invasion and metastasis. Upregulated TIMP-1. | 94 |
| Ramer R et al (2010) | Lung cancer (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Anim: 5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 0 to 3 μM | Inhibited tumor invasion and metastasis. Upregulated ICAM and TIMP-1. | 106 |
| Zhu LX et al (2000) | Lung cancer (animal) | Δ9-THC | Anim: 5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 0 to 3 μM | Enhanced tumor growth. Inhibited antitumor immunity. Upregulated IL-10 and TGF-β, downregulated IFN-γ. Increased tumor growth. Increased COX-2 expression. CB1 and CB2 receptors antagonist did not block this effect. | 100, 137 |
| Gardner B et al (2003) | Lung cancer | Met-AEA | 5 mg/kg (i.p.) | Inhibition tumor invasion. | 94 |
| Elbaz M et al (2015) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Anim: 10 mg/kg (p.t.), Cell: 3 to 15 μM | Inhibited tumor cell growth and metastasis. Inhibited EGF/EGFR pathway. | 138 |
| Grimaldi C et al (2006) | Breast cancer (cell culture) | AEA | 0 to 20 μM | Inhibited tumor cell invasion and metastasis. Modulation of FAK phosphorylation. | 139 |
| Mohammadpour F et al (2017) | Breast cancer (cell culture) | AEA, AM251 | 10 to 500 nM, 1 to 100 nM | Decreases cancer stem cell invasiveness. No correlation between reduced invasion and cytotoxic effects | 140 |
| Murase R et al (2014) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | Δ9-THC, CBD, O-1663, SR141716, SR144528 | 20 μM, Anim: 0.1 to 100 mg/kg, Cell: 1 to 4 μM, 1 μM, 1 to 4 μM, 1 to 4 μM | Inhibited tumor cell proliferation, invasion, metastasis and increased survival. Down-regulated ID1 expression. | 141 |
| Sophocleous A et al (2015) | Breast cancer (cell culture) | HU-308, JWH-133 | 0 to 10 μM, 0 to 10 μM | Reduced tumor cell viability. Induced P13A/AKT activity. | 142 |
| Qamri Z et al (2009) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | JWH-133, WIN-55, 212-2, AM251, SR144528 | All Anim: 5 mg/kg/day (i.p.), All cell: 10 μM | Reduced tumor cell growth and metastasis. Induced apoptosis. Regulation of cyclooxygenase-2/prostaglandin E2 pathways | 89 |
| McKallip RJ et al (2005) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | Δ9-THC, AM251 | Anim: 0 to 50 mg/kg, Cell: 0 to 20 μM | Enhanced tumor growth and metastasis. Suppressed antitumor immune response. Increased IL-1 and 10. | 98 |
| Ligresti A et al (2006) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | Δ9-THC, CBD | Anim: 5 mg/kg, Cell: 10 μM, Anim: 5 mg/kg, Cell: 10 μM, Anim: 5 mg/kg, Cell: 10 μM, 6.5 mg/kg | Inhibited tumor growth, decreased metastasis. Induced apoptosis via CB2, TRPV1, non CB2/TRPV1 elevation of Ca2+ and ROS. | 143 |
| McAllister SD et al (2011) | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture) | CBD | Anim: 1, 5 mg/kg (i.p.), Cell: 1.5 μM | Inhibited tumor growth and metastasis. Down-regulated ID1 expression. Modulated ERK and p38 MAPK activity. | 144 |
| Author (year)          | Type of tumor (model type)                  | Cannabinoids          | Dose/Concentration (route)                                      | Findings                                                                 | Ref. |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Caffarel MM et al     | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture)     | ∆9-THC                | Anim: 0.5 mg/anim. (p.t.) Cell: 6 and 10 μM Anim: 0.05 mg/anim (p.t.) Cell: 6 and 10 μM | Reduced tumor growth, number and metastases. Inhibited tumor proliferation, induced tumor apoptosis, impaired tumor angiogenesis. Inhibited Akt pathway. | 145  |
| Nasser MW et al       | Breast cancer (animal and cell culture)     | JWH-015               | Anim: 5 mg/kg (p.t.) Cell: 20 μM | Inhibited tumor growth. Inhibited CXCL12-induced ERK activation. | 146  |
| Laezza C et al        | Breast cancer (cell culture)                | Met-AEA               | 10 μM | Induced tumor cell cycle arrest in S-phase. Increased p21 and p27, inhibited Cdk2. | 147  |
| Laezza C et al        | Breast cancer (cell culture)                | Met-AEA               | 2.5 to 10 μM | Inhibited tumor cell migration. Inhibited the rhoA activity. | 148  |
| Laezza C et al        | Breast cancer (cell culture)                | Met-AEA               | 10 μM | Inhibited tumor growth. Inhibited HMG-CoA reductase. | 92   |
| Shrivastava A et al   | Breast cancer (cell culture)                | CBD                   | 0 to 10 μM | Induced tumor cell death. Induced autophagy and apoptosis. Induced ER stress, inhibited AKT and mTOR pathway. | 56   |
| Donadelli M et al     | Pancreatic cancer (animal and cell culture) | SR141716              | Anim: 0.28 mg/kg/2xweek (i.p.) Cell: 0 to 100 μM Cell: 0 to 560 μM Cell: 0 to 100 μM | Augmented effect of gemcitabine. Inhibited tumor growth. Increased ROS. Effect induced by NFκB mechanism. | 108  |
| Dando I et al         | Pancreatic cancer (cell culture)            | ACPA GW405833         | 200 μM | Inhibited tumor cell growth. Induction of AMPK-dependent autophagy. | 69   |
| Carracedo A et al     | Pancreatic tumor (animal and cell culture)  | Δ9-THC                | Anim: 15 mg/kg (p.t.) Cell: 0 to 4 μM 1.5 mg/kg (p.t.) 1.5 mg/kg for 2 d, 2.25 mg/kg for 2 d, 3.0 mg/kg for 10 d | Reduced tumor growth. Induced apoptosis, increased ceramide levels, up-regulated p8. Apoptosis induced via ER stress and TRB3. | 62   |
| De Petrocellis L et al| Prostate cancer (animal and cell culture)   | Cannabis sativa extract | Animal: 1, 10, 100 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 1 to 10 μM | Inhibited tumor viability. Induced apoptosis (intrinsic pathways). Potentiated the effects of bicalutamide and docetaxel. | 110  |
| Olea-Herrero N et al  | Prostate cancer (animal and cell culture)   | JWH-015               | Animal: 0.15 mg/kg (s.c.) Cell: 10 μM | Reduced tumor growth. Induced apoptosis. Triggered a de novo synthesis of ceramide. Activated JNK, inhibited AKT. | 149  |
| Ruiz L et al          | Prostate cancer (cell culture)              | ∆9-THC                | WIN-55, 212-2 AM251 1 to 10 μM 0.5 to 1 μM 5 μM | Δ9-THC: induced apoptosis in a dose-dependent manner. WIN-55, 212-2 and AM251: no effect. | 150  |
| Sarfraz S et al       | Prostate cancer (cell culture)              | WIN-55, 212-2         | 1 to 10 μM | Inhibited tumor cell growth, induced apoptosis. Activated ERK1/2, arrest of cells in the G0/G1 phase. | 151  |
| Nithipatikom K et al  | Prostate cancer (cell culture)              | WIN-55, 212-2         | 0.5 μM | Inhibited tumor cell migration. Decreased Rho activity. Increased ras1 and cdc42 activity. | 152  |
| Coke CJ et al         | Mammary adenocarcinoma                      | AM1241 AM630 JWH-015  | 1 μM 1 μM 1 μM | Reduced tumor cell invasiveness, calcium mobilization and cellular chemotaxis. Reduced CXCR4-mediated migration of immune cells and expression of phosphorylated ERK1/2. | 95   |
| Khan MI et al         | Renal cell carcinoma (cell culture)         | WIN-55, 212-2 JHW-133 | 0 to 25 μM 0 to 25 μM | WIN-55, 212-2: apoptosis via arrest in the G0/G1 phase. JHW-133: no effect. | 153  |
| Bífukco M et al       | Thyroid cancer (animal and cell culture)    | Met-F-AEA             | Animal: 0.5 mg/kg (p.t.) Cell: 5 nM | Reduced tumor volume. Inhibited tumor proliferation and transition to the S-phase. Reduced ras activity. | 154  |
| Bífukco M et al       | Thyroid cancer (animal)                     | VDM-11 AA-5-HT        | 5 mg/kg (i.t.) | Inhibited tumor growth. | 155  |
| Author(s) (year) | Type of tumor (model type) | Cannabinoids | Dose/Concentration (route) | Findings | Ref. |
|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|----------|-----|
| Vara D et al (2013) | Liver cancer (animal and cell culture) | ∆9-THC | Anim: 15 mg/kg (p.o.) Cell: 8 μM Anim: 1.5 mg/kg (p.o.) Cell: 8 μM | Upregulated PPARγ-dependent pathways. PPARγ-dependent activated autophagy. | 156 |
| Vara D et al (2011) | Liver cancer (animal and cell culture) | ∆9-THC | Anim: 15 mg/kg (p.t.) Cell: 8 μM Anim: 1.5 mg/kg (p.t.) Cell: 8 μM | Reduced tumor growth and viability. Induced autophagy via TRB3, CaCMKKβ/AMPK. | 58 |
| Huang L et al (2011) | Liver cancer (animal and cell culture) | AEA | Anim: 10 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 0 to 10 μM Anim: 10 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 0 to 10 μM | GPR55-dependent reduced tumor proliferation. Increased JNK activity. Activated Fas death. | 87 |
| DeMorrow S et al. (2008) | Liver cancer (animal and cell culture) | AEA | Anim: 10 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 10 μM | Inhibited tumor growth. Activated noncanonical Wnt signaling pathway and JNK. | 157 |
| Xian X et al. (2016) | Gastric cancer (cell culture) | WIN-55, 212-2 | 5 μM | Inhibited tumor cell migration, invasion and EMT. Downregulated COX-2 expression, decreased the phosphorylation of AKT. | 158 |
| Miyato H et al. (2009) | Gastric cancer (cell culture) | AEA | Anim: 10 mg/kg (i.p.) Cell: 10 μM | Enhanced cytotoxic effect of paclitaxel. Suppressed tumor proliferation. Induced apoptosis. | 109 |
| Fonseca BM et al. (2018) | Endometrial cancer (cell culture) | AEA 2-AG 2-THC | to 25 μM to 25 μM to 25 μM 0.01 to 25 μM | AEA and CBD: modulate cancer cell death. Increase the levels of activated caspase 3/7. 2-AG and ∆9-THC: no effect. | 159 |
| Zhang Y et al. (2018) | Endometrial cancer (samples from patients and cell culture) | ∆9-THC | 0.1 to 20 μM | Inhibited tumor cell viability and motility. Inhibited EMT and downregulated MMP-9 gene expression. | 160 |
| Armstrong JL et al. (2015) | Melanoma (animal) | ∆9-THC ∆9-THC + CBD | 15 mg/kg (p.o.) 7.5 mg/kg each (p.o.) | Inhibited melanoma viability, proliferation and tumour growth. Activated autophagy, apoptosis and loss of cells. | 59 |
| Glodde N et al. (2015) | Melanoma (animal) | ∆9-THC | 5 mg/kg (s.c.) | Inhibited tumor growth. | 161 |
| Blázquez C et al. (2006) | Melanoma (animal and cell culture) | ∆9-THC WIN-55, 212-2 JWH-133 | Cell: 1 μM Anim: 50 μg/day (p.t.) Cell: 0.1 μM Anim: 50 μg/day (p.t.) | Decreased tumor growth, proliferation, angiogenesis and metastasis. Increased apoptosis. Inhibited Act. | 162 |
| Nakajima J et al. (2013) | Skin cancer (animal) | JWH-018 JWH-122 JWH-210 | 0.02 to 0.2 μM (t) 0.2 to 2 μM (t) 0.2 to 2 μM (t) | Inhibited tumor promotion and inflammation. | 163 |
| Casanova ML et al. (2003) | Nonmelanoma skin cancer (animal, cell culture and samples from patients) | WIN-55, 212-2 JWH-133 | Anim: 1.58 μg (p.t.) Cell: 25 nM Anim: 1.58 μg (p.t.) Cell: 25 nM | Induced apoptosis, inhibition tumor cell growth. Decreased expression of VEGF, placental growth factor, angiopoietin 2. Abrogated EGFR function. | 90 |
| Capozzi A et al. (2018) | Jurkat Leukemia (cell culture) | LV50 | 0.1 to 10 μM | Inhibited cell survival and proapoptotic activity. | 164 |
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endoplasmic reticulum (30), can activate, in addition to cannabinoids, a variety of exogenous and endogenic stimuli – capsaicin (component of chili pepper), allyl isothiocyanate (constituent of mustard and wasabi), temperature above 43 °C, acidic environment (6, 31). TRPV1 are found primarily on non-myelinated and weakly myelinated type C and Aδ neural fibrils of the peripheral nervous system and therefore are included in pain modulation. Furthermore, TRPV1 is found in CNS cells but also other cells (epithelium, endothelium, glia, immune cells, osteoclasts, hepatocytes, fibroblasts, etc.) (32). Activation of TRPV1 receptors leads to a number of functions – increased intracellular Ca²⁺ concentration, increased cation flow in neurons, increased release of vasoactive peptides in nerve fibers. It is also very important that several stimuli can increase or decrease the sensitivity of TRPV1 receptors. Modulations of receptor function by inflammation, protein kinase phosphorylation, temperature, pH, membrane potential, etc. are also important (6). Interestingly, anandamide binds to the same binding site as capsaicin, but the activation of the TRPV1 receptor by temperature or pH is at another site of the receptor (33).

Another potential part of the endocannabinoid system is the group of ligand-activated transcription factors and nuclear receptors collectively called PPARs. These are three isofoms of PPARα, PPARβ, and PPARγ. They are activated by fatty acid derivatives (prostaglandins, leukotrienes), but PPARs function more like general lipid sensors that monitor local changes in metabolism. PPARα is clinically affected by the action of fibrates (gemfibrozil and fenofibrate), PPARγ is the target of thiazolidinediones (pioglitazone, rosiglitazone, and troglitazone). These receptors are expressed primarily in the liver, PPARα in skeletal muscles and PPARγ in adipose tissue. A number of cannabinoid agonists are also PPARs agonists. However, the potential of cannabinoids to activate PPARs is relatively small compared to their potential to activate CB1 and CB2 receptors (6).

In addition to the aforementioned receptors, cannabinoids can be used to modulate the functions of many important receptors such as opioid, acetylcholine, serotonin, glycine receptors, and others (6).

**Cannabinoids in the treatment of pain and as a symptomatic treatment of cancer patients**

The cannabinoid receptor system, their ligands and metabolizing enzymes regulate pain at all levels – supraspinal, spinal, and peripheral. The analgesic effect is mediated not only by binding to CB1 and CB2 receptors, but also to the reduction of endocannabinoid metabolism and uptake, and affecting other receptor systems (TRPV1, GPR55, PPARs, and opioid receptors). Cannabinoid-mediated pain modulation involves a number of mechanisms – inhibiting the release of presynaptic neurotransmitters and neuropeptides, modulating the postsynaptic excitability of neurons, activating the descending inhibitory system, and influencing the inflammatory response in the nervous system (34). For this reason, we find some potential in the use of cannabinoids in the treatment of pain. Cannabinoids have the greatest effect on the treatment of allodynia, neuropathic pain, medication-rebound headache, and chronic oncological pain. The treatment of acute pain with cannabinoids is not superior to
non-opioid analgesia, and the treatment of cancer-related pain by cannabinoids provides only a mild analgesic effect (35). However, the data on the efficacy of cannabinoids in neuropathic pain are inconsistent, as well as the data on safety and good tolerability of these drugs in the treatment of any chronic pain (36). The Canadian Pain Society has recently recommended cannabinoids as third-line drugs for the treatment of chronic neuropathic pain (37). Additionally, the German and Israeli Pain Society recommends the use of cannabinoids as third-line drugs in the treatment of chronic pain (38). At the supraspinal level, stimulation of the CB1 receptor has a significant analgesic effect. In the murine model, supraspinal administration of selective CB1 receptor agonist VD-hemopressin (α) has a significant dose-dependent effect. This effect is significantly reduced by the administration of the CB1 receptor antagonist. Furthermore, it appears that stimulation of the TRVP1 receptor can play a role in this analgesic effect (39). Cannabinoid receptor agonists increase the analgesic effect of opioid receptor agonists (e.g., morphine). The addition of cannabinoid receptor agonists significantly and dose-dependently increases the analgesic effect of the μ-opioid agonists. However, this analgesic effect is different for various cannabinoid receptor agonists. The addition of CP55.94 to morphine has a greater effect than adding Δ9-THC. This finding is important for designing mixtures combining cannabinoids and opiates (40).

The effect of cannabinoids in the treatment of anorexia in patients with advanced tumors is controversial. It is unclear whether cannabinoids have a positive effect on weight gain or appetite. The level of evidence on this issue is very low (41).

At present, it is not conclusively proven that cannabinoids have an effect on the reduction of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (42). However, they appear to have a greater effect on the suppression of nausea and vomiting compared to placebo and they have the same effect compared to prochlorperazine. The combination of cannabinoids and other antiemetic drugs does not add additive effects and is associated with a greater number of undesirable effects (cognitive impairment, drowsiness) (43). Based on these data, the use of cannabinoids in the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting cannot be unambiguously encouraged or rejected.

In conclusion, cannabinoids are effective in the treatment of pain in adults and may have an effect on the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting (44).

Cannabinoids as antitumor therapies

Cannabinoids as antitumor treatment can work by three types of mechanisms. The first is the stimulation of cell death by the mechanism of autophagy, apoptosis mediated by autophagy, and influencing signaling pathway leading to apoptosis. The second group is the inhibition of tumor angiogenesis, invasiveness, and metastasis. The third mechanism is the modulation of the antitumor immune response (45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52).

Stimulation of cell death

Basic signaling pathways of cannabinoid receptors influencing differentiation, proliferation, and cell death have been outlined in the section on cannabinoid receptors. At this point, we will focus on two main mechanisms by which cannabinoids lead to the stimulation of cell death, namely autophagy and apoptosis.

Autophagy

This is an old evolutionary process that involves the packaging of cellular organelles by a two-membrane bag called autophagosome. In the second step, the autophagosome merges with lysosomes, leading to the degradation of cellular organelles (53). Although autophagy is primarily cytoprotective, it can also trigger apoptosis (54). Interestingly, autophagy may be a protection from apoptosis on the one hand, but on the other hand, it acts as an alternative pathway inducing apoptosis (55). A Beclin-1 protein plays a key role in the process of autophagy and apoptosis. This protein blocks autophagy when bound to the Bcl-2 protein complex, Bcl-2 proteins are key proteins in the regulation of apoptosis. If the Beclin-1/Bcl-2 complex is cleaved (e.g. caspases), autophagy is induced. In addition, fission products of this complex enter mitochondria and stimulate cytochrome c and induce apoptosis (56). Cannabinoids induce autophagy by two mechanisms, both of which lead to the inhibition of the autophagy key axis (PI3K/AKT/mTOR signaling pathway (see CB1 receptor)). Autophagy appears to be a key mechanism of antitumor action of cannabinoids. It is also important that apoptosis is blocked by blocking autophagy, but blocking apoptosis itself does not block cannabinoid-induced autophagy. It is clear from this observation that autophagy not only precedes and stimulates apoptosis, but is essential for cannabinoid-induced apoptosis (57, 58, 59). The most important mechanism by which cannabinoids induce autophagy is the accumulation of ceramide in tumor cells. Ceramide is a sphingolipid composed of sphingosine and fatty acids, and it is a major component of cell membranes. Cannabinoids increase ceramide concentration in the cell by two mechanisms. The first is the hydrolysis of sphingomyelin by the sphingomyelinase enzyme, thus creating ceramide only when activating the CB1 receptor. The second is de novo synthesis of ceramide with the enzyme serine-palmitoyl transferase (SPT) which generates ceramide by activating both CB1 and CB2 receptors (60). The accumulation of ceramide in the cell stimulates the stress response of the endoplasmic reticulum (ER stress). ER stress results in increased phosphorylation of eIF2α, resulting in up-regulation of p8 protein, followed by the activation of transcription factors (ATF-4, CHOP) leading to the activation of TRB3. Between these proteins and transcription factors, there is a series of feedback circuits. TRB3 subsequently inhibits the PI3K/AKT/mTOR signal pathway at a level between mTORC2 and ACT (57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67). The signaling pathway p8/ATF4/CHOP/TRB3, followed by the inhibition of the PI3K/AKT/mTOR cascade, is probably the most important antitumoral mechanism of cannabinoids (45, 57, 58). The second signaling pathway by that cannabinoids activate autophagy by inhibiting the PI3K/AKT/mTOR pathway is the activation of CaCMKKβ. This protein kinase, like the previous signaling pathway, is activated by ER stress. The next stage is the activation of AMPK, which directly phosphorylates and activates TCS2, the major direct inhibitor of mTORC1. The mTORC1
Apoptosis

In addition to activating apoptosis via autophagy, cannabinoids stimulate apoptosis with several mechanisms independent of autophagy. Apoptosis can be induced in two ways. The first is an external pathway that begins with the activation of death receptors (TNFR, FAS). The ligands of these receptors via the TRADD/FASS pathway initiate the caspase pathway (caspase 8 and 3) leading to apoptosis (71). The second is an internal pathway that starts with the activation of the Bcl-2 receptors mitochondrial family (BID, BAK, BAX). An important part is the cytoplasmic protein BID, which stimulates the Bcl-2 receptors mitochondrial family (BID, BAK, BAX) and subsequently, the activation of cytochrome c and caspase 9, which stimulates apoptosis. The outer and inner paths are interconnected by caspase 8 (72).

The signal pathway PI3K/AKT/mTOR activates apoptosis by several mechanisms. The first mechanism is to modulate the inhibition of two important Cdk inhibitors, namely p21 and p27, modulation of which is mediated by AKT and FOXO (73, 74, 75). If AKT phosphorylates FOXO, the transition of FOXO to the cell nucleus is prevented. However, if FOXO is dephosphorylated, it passes into the cell nucleus and acts as a transcription factor stimulating the expression of p21 and p27 (76). The Cdk-cyclin complex is a very important cell cycle stimulator, inactivating it by stopping the cell cycle in phase G, which subsequently stimulates apoptosis. The second mechanism by which the PI3K/AKT/mTOR pathway initiates apoptosis is the modulation of the already mentioned inner pathway of apoptosis activation. AKT directly inhibits the pro-apoptotic proteins of the Bcl-2 family (BAD) by enhancing the phosphorylation of these proteins, i.e. AKT inhibition induced by cannabinoids leads to BAD activation and subsequent apoptosis (77).

Very important pathways that regulate apoptosis are signaling pathways involved in a large family of MAP kinases (Ras/Raf-1/MEK/ERK, c-jun (JNK), p38). Cannabinoids regulate apoptosis and stimulate these signaling pathways. The already mentioned increased production of ceramide results in the activation of the Ras/Raf-1/MEK/ERK signaling pathway. This pathway is associated primarily with EGFR and other growth factor receptors (51, 60). The binding of the ligand to the growth factor receptor leads primarily to the activation of the RAS family, which are small GTPases that exchange GDP for GTP, leading to the phosphorylation of RAF-1, MEK, and ERK. This signaling pathway increases the production of various transcription factors (c-fos...) and modulates the processes of apoptosis and cell cycle (78, 79). Also, the potential cannabinoid receptor GPR55 acts by Ras/Raf-1/MEK/ERK and JNK modulation (30, 80, 81). However, it appears that the EGFR/ERK signaling pathway leads to the inhibition of the p8/ATF4/CHOP/TRB3 signaling pathway and, consequently, to increased activities of the PI3K/AKT/mTOR signaling pathway and the inhibition of apoptosis and tumor cell resistance to cannabinoids (82). However, there is a work that shows that cannabinoids can also lead to the downregulation of the EGF/EGFR signaling pathway and subsequently stimulate tumor cell apoptosis (83, 84). This effect is further stimulated by the activation of FAAH inhibitors (83). EGF/EGFR pathway downregulation also leads to the inhibition of macrophage recruitment and EMT inhibition, further reducing the progression of tumor growth (84).

Another proapoptotic signaling pathway that cannabinoids can modulate is the induction of cell death by interacting with receptors belonging to the TNFR family. These receptors belong to the group of the so-called death receptors (DR) which seek the outer pathway of activating apoptosis. It has been shown that the use of cannabinoids increases the sensitivity of tumor cells to DR ligands. This synergistic effect may be the basis for the joint use of cannabinoids and DR ligands for the treatment of oncological patients (60, 85). Cannabinoids modulate both (external and internal) pathways of apoptosis activation.

Cannabinoids activate apoptosis by mechanisms independent of CB1 and CB2 receptors. Activation of the GPR55 receptor results in the recruitment of FAS, DR, and activation of the JNK signaling pathway (30, 86, 87). Also, through the activation of PPARs and TRPV, cannabinoids modulate apoptosis (30). Another mechanism by which cannabinoids can induce apoptosis is the activation of the COX-2 signaling pathway (88, 89).

Inhibition of angiogenesis, invasiveness, and metastasis

The major proangiogenic factors that are inhibited by cannabinoids are VEGF, PLGF, Ang-2 (90, 91). The process of angiogenesis is extremely complex and involves the chemotaxis of endothelial cells, their migration, invasion, and proliferation into the target tissue, differentiation into tubular capillaries and basal membrane production. CBD modulates the process of angiogenesis without affecting endothelial cell apoptosis or necrosis (90). A key signaling cascade of angiogenesis that is affected by CB1 and CB2 receptor agonists is the rhoA/FAK/Src signaling pathway. This signaling pathway plays a key role not only in angiogenesis, but also in cell adhesion and cell migration (51). A key factor in this pathway is rhoA, which exists in two states – inactive, in which GDP is bound to rhoA and active, in which GTP is bound to rhoA. When rhoA is in the active state, it phosphorylates FAK thereby progressively reducing the formation of VEGF, PGF and Ang-2 (51, 92), which results in decreased activation of VEGFR-2.

Cannabinoids inhibit the expression of two important proteases, namely MMP2 and MMP9. These proteases play an important
role in the extracellular matrix and basal membrane remodeling process. Furthermore, cannabinoids also affect TIMP1 expression. TIMP1 has a dual function in the body. First, it is a metalloproteinase inhibitor, but it also affects tumor proliferation and angiogenesis by mechanisms independent of MMP (91, 93, 94). In addition to these mechanisms, cannabinoids also interfere with a number of other signaling pathways (CXCL16, CXCR4, IL-8, ET-1, SerpinE1/PAI1, uPA, PDGF-AA). These factors play an important role in the process of angiogenesis, invasiveness, adhesion, and extracellular matrix degradation (87, 95, 96).

Very important is the finding that influencing angiogenesis by decreasing VEGF production and decreasing activation of VEGFR-2 occurs via the ceramide/p8 pathway (97). Also, inhibition of MMP2 and MMP9 is likely to occur via the ceramide/p8 pathway (93). As mentioned above, this finding also supports the theory that the influence of de novo ceramide synthesis is probably a key mechanism in the antitumor effect of cannabinoids.

**Modulation of the antitumor immune response of cannabinoids**

The antitumor effect of cannabinoids can also be caused by an antitumor immune response. However, current data show that cannabinoids rather reduce the effectiveness of the antitumor immune response and thus lead to the progression of tumor growth and metastasis. It is believed that the anticancer immune response is primarily mediated by Th1 lymphocytes. On the other hand, the increase in Th2 lymphocytes leads to the stimulation of tumor growth. Cannabinoids can lead to increased production of IL-4, IL-6, IL-10, and TGF-β, which are interleukins increasing Th2 lymphocyte production and, on the other hand, cannabinoids reduce IL-2 and IFN-γ production. This effect is due to the activation of CB2 receptors (98, 99, 100).

It must be said that this pronounced immunosuppressive effect of cannabinoids, which reduces antitumor immune surveillance, seems to be the biggest problem in the clinical use of cannabinoids as antitumor drugs. The solution would be to use selective CB1 receptor agonists and CB2 receptor antagonists in the treatment of cancer patients.

For completeness, it is to be noted that cannabinoids lead to increased ICAM-1 expression, thereby increasing the susceptibility of tumor cells to LAK, leading to the cytolysis of tumor cells (105). By way of activation of ICAM-1, cannabinoids also reduce tumor cell invasiveness and metastasis (106).

**Combination of cannabinoids with other anticancer treatments**

Cannabinoids have a certain effect on tumor cells that are highly resistant to routine chemotherapy. This mechanism may be due to the fact that the administration of cannabinoids with other chemotherapy or radiotherapy increases the sensitivity of tumor cells to anticancer therapy (45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52). Cannabinoids are believed to have a synergistic effect with antitumoral chemotherapy and radiotherapy (45). The most studied and cited is a combination of cannabinoids with temozolomide, a chemotherapeutic agent used to treat brain tumors, especially glioblastoma multiforme. It has been shown that the therapy of glioblastoma multiforme with small doses of cannabinoids and temozolomide has a much greater antitumor effect than the use of both substances alone (107). In addition to temozolomide, it has been shown that cannabinoids have a synergistic effect with gemcitabine (108), paclitaxel (109), docetaxel (110), and 5-fluorouracil (111).

The combination of cannabinoids with other chemotherapeutics is advantageous in glioblastomas that are primarily resistant to the antitumor effect of cannabinoids. The antitumor effect of cannabinoids against glioblastoma cells is primarily mediated by autophagy (see above).

Some types of glioblastomas show resistance to cannabinoids, which is likely to be due to increased expression of the MDK gene. The product of this gene is MDK protein activating ALK. Activation of ALK dramatically reduces cannabinoid-mediated autophagy. Therefore, a combination of cannabinoids with MDK/ALK-inhibiting substances could have a major effect on enhancing autophagy and thus the antitumoral effect of cannabinoids (112).

However, the MDK/ALK signaling pathway is not the only one that inhibits cannabinoid-mediated autophagy in glioblastoma. Increased expression of amphiregulin, a protein belonging to a large EGF family, results in increased activation of the EGFR/ERK signaling pathway. As mentioned, this signaling pathway inhibits the p8/ATF4/CHOP/TRB3 signaling pathway and subsequently increases PI3K/AKT/mTOR signaling pathway to inhibit autophagy and apoptosis (82).

The use of MDK/ALK and EGFR/ERK signaling pathway inhibitors in combination with cannabinoids could have a great effect in the treatment of glioblastoma (46).

**Discussion**

Cannabinoids (phytocannabinoids and synthetic cannabinoids) have a promising potential in the treatment of cancer patients. Apart from symptomatic treatment (nausea, pain, anorexia), where cannabinoids mainly affect chronic pain, their antitumor effect may also be applied. The main mechanism of action is the activation of autophagy and subsequent stimulation of tumor cell apoptosis. Autophagy is primarily activated by the accumulation of ceramide in the tumor cell. If we consider cannabinoids as an antitumor treatment, we need to consider several factors. Cannabinoids affect not only CB1 and CB2 receptors, but can also affect many other receptors (GPR55, TRP, PPARs). Therefore, it is very important to know what the expression of all cannabinoid receptors is – not only on tumor cells but also on cells of the immune system. It is
also necessary to take into account the effect of epigenetics, which means which signaling pathways (p8-TRB3, AKT, AMPK, CKD, MDK/ALK, etc.) are active in the tumor. There is a great deal of influence on the activity of cannabinoids where the different affinity and intrinsic activity of cannabinoids on cannabinoid receptors can lead to different effects in a particular tumor. Therefore, the question is whether to focus on the Cannabis sativa extract, which contains the combination of Δ9-THC, CBD, and other cannabinoids, or to use synthetic cannabinoids in which we know exactly their affinity and intrinsic activity to different receptors. It appears that a combination of a CB1 agonist and a CB2 antagonist is likely to have the greatest antitumor effect. In addition, a dose of cannabinoid should be considered, since too low (inhibition of apoptosis) or too high (immunosuppression) cannabinoid doses, on the contrary, can lead to the progression of tumor growth and metastasis. The use of cannabinoids in combination with other chemotherapies has not only a synergistic effect, but also allows the dose of chemotherapeutics to be reduced and, therefore, to reduce the undesirable effects of anticancer therapies. In particular, the combination of cannabinoids with inhibitors of MDK/ALK and EGFR/ERK signaling pathways can have a great therapeutic effect. Unfortunately, most of the current data on antitumoral effects of cannabinoids come from in vitro studies or studies in animal models. Therefore, it is essential that the antitumor effect of cannabinoids (alone or in combination with another chemo/radiotherapy) is identified in clinical trials.

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Accepted November 12, 2019.