Clinician views on and ethics priorities for authorizing medical cannabis in the care of children and youth in Canada: a qualitative study

Margot Gunning MSc, Ari D. Rotenberg BA, Lauren E. Kelly PhD, Bruce Crooks MD, Sapna Oberoi MD, Adam L. Rapoport MD MHSc, S. Rod Rassekh MD, Judy Illes CM PhD

Abstract

Background: The use of cannabis for medical purposes by pediatric patients is expanding across Canada; however, supporting evidence, federal regulations and treatment guidelines are lacking. To understand factors affecting treatment decisions in this landscape, we sought to delineate clinician perspectives, ethics priorities and values for cannabis authorization.

Methods: We sampled participants purposefully through Canadian Childhood Cannabinoid Clinical Trials listservs, which include the majority of pediatric oncologists and palliative care physicians practising in Canada, among many other pediatric physicians and clinicians. Inclusion criteria were being a practising clinician in Canada, involvement in the care of children and willingness to be interviewed regardless of stance on medical cannabis. In November and December 2020, we conducted semistructured interviews focusing on principles, values and priorities, including medical, professional, regulatory, evidentiary and social considerations, for authorizing medical cannabis to children. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed by means of deductive and inductive thematic methods.

Results: We conducted 18 interviews with a diverse group of clinicians representing a range of specialties within pediatric care, including neurology, palliative care, oncology, family medicine and pharmacology. The interviews yielded 4 themes and 12 subthemes related to a priori (medical, professional, regulatory, evidentiary and social themes) and emergent themes. The 4 themes of access, relationships and relational autonomy (autonomy within relationships), medically appropriate use and research priorities were grounded in principles of harm reduction. Participants described problematic authorization procedures that negatively affect patient use. Principles associated with relational autonomy were highlighted as a feature of open clinical communication. Benefits of appropriate medical uses weighed positively over risks, even in the context of potential effects on neurodevelopment. Participants expressed that more research is essential to align medical cannabis with biomedical standards.

Interpretation: Clinicians reported pursuing ethical use of medical cannabis for pediatric patients and prioritizing their safety under principles of harm reduction. There is a need for evidence about neurodevelopmental risks, support for research, treatment guidelines and greater knowledge about stakeholder perspectives to alleviate burdens related to use of medical cannabis for pediatric patients in Canada.

The federal government of Canada provided a system for therapeutic access to cannabis in 2001 after a series of successful constitutional challenges on cannabis prohibitions. Clinicians provide authorizations, rather than prescriptions, for medical cannabis owing to its current status and regulation within Health Canada. Two decades later, the position of medical cannabis within Canadian legislation, health care and society continues to evolve. Driven largely by public awareness, anecdotes of benefit and expanded approvals for oral administration of derivative products, medical cannabis has become an increasingly prevalent treatment option for children with neurodevelopmental and life-limiting conditions including brain and other cancers.

Despite this trend, data on potential medical properties and clinical applications of cannabis are generally lacking, and standards regarding use in children are largely absent. Clinicians are practising, therefore, in a landscape defined by high patient and caregiver interest, little medical data, and tensions arising from an absence of regulations and treatment

Competing interests: None declared.

This article has been peer reviewed.

Correspondence to: Judy Illes, jilles@mail.ubc.ca

CMAJ Open 2022 March 15. DOI:10.9778/cmajo.20210239
guidelines. In situations of clinical uncertainty or hesitancy, principles of harm reduction, including pragmatism, humanism, focus on harms and prioritization of immediate goals, can be used to facilitate treatment decisions that respect patient dignity and safety.\textsuperscript{12,13}

Past studies of factors affecting the views of clinicians on medical cannabis treatment are limited but yield converging results about knowledge base, legal regulations, authorization procedures and medical context.\textsuperscript{16–19} These data are derived primarily from clinicians specializing in pain medicine, oncology, palliative care and family medicine.\textsuperscript{7,20–24} There appear to be limited data on the ethics priorities or values that shape treatment decisions about medical cannabis for children and on the effects of legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada (Cannabis Act, Oct. 17, 2018).

Our objective was to obtain a greater understanding of how ethical priorities and values — mainly access, safety and autonomy — affect clinician decision-making. The importance of filling this knowledge gap lies in both practice considerations in this unregulated landscape and the inherent vulnerability of children, whose capacity to understand and participate in treatment decisions and provide consent is still evolving.

**Methods**

**Study design**

We developed a qualitative study under a pragmatic framework with the view that empirical evidence and a dynamic, interactive and interdisciplinary process will most effectively lead to solution-oriented action.\textsuperscript{25–28} Using semistructured interviews, we facilitated flexible and exploratory dialogues with clinicians in which more nuanced thoughts and values surrounding medical cannabis were highlighted and examined in depth.\textsuperscript{29} This study was reported according to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist.\textsuperscript{30}

**Sample selection**

We sampled participants purposefully through Canadian Childhood Cannabinoid Clinical Trials (C4T) listservs. Canadian Childhood Cannabinoid Clinical Trials is an academic research team of youth, parents, clinicians and scientists studying cannabis for medical purposes in children (www.C4Trials.org). Its listservs include hundreds of Canadian clinicians working in various subspecialties related to pediatric care, at various career stages and with different backgrounds (e.g., English-speaking, French-speaking and multilingual practitioners) in urban and rural communities across British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. The listservs include the majority of pediatric oncologists and palliative care physicians practising in Canada, among many other pediatric physicians and clinicians, such as psychiatrists, pain specialists, neurologists and pharmacologists. Members are known to have views regarding medical cannabis, and are often consulted by patients and caregivers, or are active authors.

Participants were eligible if they were a practising clinician (i.e., physician, pharmacist, clinician in allied health care) involved in the care of children in Canada and were willing to be interviewed regardless of their stance on medical cannabis. Emails were sent to all members of the C4T listservs in November 2020. Eligibility was confirmed before interviews were scheduled. After individual interviews were scheduled, a reminder email was sent 2 days prior.

**Data source**

The interview guide was developed by M.G. and J.I. after engagement with C4T. It was piloted through group and one-on-one consultations with L.E.K., A.L.R., S.R.R., S.O., B.C. and additional C4T members such as researchers and patient advocates, and refined and finalized based on the feedback received. The interview guide consisted of 13 questions focusing on principles, values and priorities, including medical, professional, regulatory, evidentiary and social considerations, for authorizing medical cannabis to children (Appendix 1, available at www.cmajopen.ca/content/10/1/E196/suppl/DC1). We also collected information about participant gender, ethnicity, specialty, years in practice and location of practice.

One-on-one interviews were conducted in English by M.G. in November and December 2020. Interviews were conducted virtually on a video conferencing platform because of recruitment challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. All participants provided verbal informed consent and were reminded that they could decline to answer any question or to end the interview at any time.

**Data analysis**

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional service, checked manually, de-identified with the use of alphanumeric codes and managed in NVivo 12 (QSR International). We used deductive and inductive coding for content analysis.\textsuperscript{31} M.G. and A.D.R. reviewed interviews and field notes to write memos capturing overarching narratives before building the initial codebook around a priori (medical, professional, regulatory, evidentiary and social themes) and emergent themes, subthemes and factors using 4 interviews selected with a random number generator.\textsuperscript{32–34} M.G. and A.D.R. coded transcripts by paragraph using a rich coding strategy that allowed for the attribution of more than 1 unique code per paragraph.\textsuperscript{33,34} We determined intercoder reliability using the Cohen $\kappa$ coefficient.\textsuperscript{31–33} Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached. M.G. and A.D.R. coded the remaining interviews independently, which allowed for further refinement of thematic codes.

We calculated the proportion of coded references as the number of coded references per thematic code divided by the total number of references. We identified major subthemes and factors as the most frequently occurring subtheme and factor under each theme and subtheme, respectively.

**Ethics approval**

This study was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (REB H20-03084).
Results

Interviews were conducted with 18 participants representing a range of specialties within pediatric care, including neurology, palliative care, oncology, family medicine and pharmacology (Table 1). Half of the cohort had been in practice for 10 or more years. Eleven participants self-identified as male and 7 as female. They were of white, Asian, Black and Latino ethnicity. Participants represented 6 provinces.

The median interview time was 34 (range 29–61) minutes. Cohen κ tests yielded an overall unweighted κ statistic of 0.90, which indicated good reproducibility of the coding hierarchy (Table 2).

Themes

Overarching principles of harm reduction unified 4 a priori and emergent themes: access, relationships and relational autonomy (autonomy within relationships), medically appropriate use and research priorities (Table 2). There were 12 subthemes. Table 3 shows the proportion of interviews and of coded references (n = 1886) supporting dominant subthemes and factors. Illustrative quotes are provided in Table 4.

Access

Clinicians most frequently referred to the theme of access by comparing medical cannabis to other therapeutics and how

| Characteristic                        | No. (%) of participants |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Profession                            |                         |
| Physician                             | 16 (89)                 |
| Academic clinical researcher          | 1 (6)                   |
| Pharmacist                            | 1 (6)                   |
| Specialty                             |                         |
| Pediatric palliative care             | 7 (39)                  |
| Pediatric oncology                    | 4 (22)                  |
| Other pediatric*                      | 4 (22)                  |
| Family medicine                       | 1 (6)                   |
| Clinical pharmacology                 | 1 (6)                   |
| Research pharmacology                 | 1 (6)                   |
| Years in practice                     |                         |
| < 10                                  | 9 (50)                  |
| ≥ 10                                  | 9 (50)                  |
| Gender†                               |                         |
| Male                                  | 11 (61)                 |
| Female                                | 7 (39)                  |
| Location of practice                  |                         |
| Ontario                               | 8 (44)                  |
| British Columbia                      | 4 (22)                  |
| Manitoba                              | 2 (11)                  |
| Saskatchewan                          | 2 (11)                  |
| Alberta                               | 1 (6)                   |
| Quebec                                | 1 (6)                   |
| Ethnicity†                            |                         |
| White                                 | 14 (78)                 |
| Asian                                 | 2 (11)                  |
| Black                                 | 1 (6)                   |
| Latino                                | 1 (6)                   |

*Includes pediatric neurology, general pediatrics and pediatric clinical pharmacology.
†Self-identified.

| Major theme; subtheme | Factor                        |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Access                | Authorization burden           |
|                       | Supply and quality            |
|                       | Clinician                     |
|                       | Financial                     |
| Law and policy burden | Federal                       |
|                       | Provincial                    |
|                       | Hospital policy               |
| Patient burden        | Pragmatic use                 |
|                       | Conditional rights            |
| Relationships and relational autonomy | Clinical communication |
|                       | Individualistic approach      |
|                       | Data transparency             |
|                       | Informed consent              |
| Clinical support      | Support and guide use         |
|                       | Responsibility to educate     |
|                       | Referrals                     |
| Nonclinical communication | Misconceptions, misperceptions |
|                       | Public promotion of information|
| Medically appropriate use | Risk–benefit calculus        |
|                       | Harms                         |
|                       | Balance risk and benefit      |
| Evidence-based treatment | Considered option             |
|                       | Not considered option         |
| Consumption           | Various forms, routes, dosages |
|                       | Recommendations               |
| Research priorities   | Necessary research            |
|                       | Data from any scientific method|
|                       | Appropriate use               |
|                       | Adverse effects               |
|                       | Efficacy                      |
|                       | Safety                        |
|                       | Dosing                        |
|                       | Randomized controlled clinical trials |
| Barriers to research  | Study design                  |
|                       | Institutional                 |
| Research ethics       | Ethical considerations        |
|                       | Obligations                   |
unique barriers can interfere with patient safety (18 interviews [100%]; 532 coded references [28.2%]). Obstacles to authorization was a notable subtheme. Major factors influencing authorization included considerations about product supply and quality, professional reputation and knowledge required to authorize. Participants also mentioned financial obstacles that patients and their families face, including high cost and lack of insurance coverage (Table 4).

Law and policy burdens were described by clinicians as regulations that impede authorization and patient access. Participants most often cited negative impacts of federal regulations on access (18 interviews [100%]; 99 coded references [5.2%]). For example, participants explained that Health Canada’s refusal to provide a Drug Identification Number for medical cannabis lies directly upstream of authorization obstacles. They described the impact of federal legalization of adult use of recreational cannabis on patient access: although clinical decision-making did not change, participants perceived a decline in research barriers and in social and institutional stigma. Minor factors (i.e., provincial law and hospital policy) were cited infrequently as factors affecting access (< 5.0% of coded references).

Within the subtheme of patient burden, participants cited behaviours and rights that can create barriers to safe and effective treatment (18 interviews [100%]; 108 coded references [5.7%]). They suggested that patients and caregivers find and use cannabis for therapeutic purposes regardless of authorization status or clinical guidance. Participants also acknowledged that patients have a right to inquire about medical cannabis, but their right to receive medical cannabis is conditional on medical context.

Table 3: Frequency of interviews and coded references endorsing themes, and dominant subthemes and factors

| Theme; subtheme; factor | No. (%) of interviews n = 18 | No. (%) of coded references n = 1886 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Access                  | 18 (100)                      | 532 (28.2)                          |
| Authorization burden    | 18 (100)                      | 269 (14.3)                          |
| Supply and quality      | 17 (94)                       | 108 (5.7)                           |
| Relationships and relational autonomy | 18 (100) | 526 (27.9) |
| Clinical communication  | 18 (100)                      | 313 (16.6)                          |
| Individualistic approach| 18 (100)                      | 169 (9.0)                           |
| Medically appropriate use | 18 (100)        | 487 (25.8)                          |
| Risk–benefit calculus   | 18 (100)                      | 267 (14.2)                          |
| Harms                   | 18 (100)                      | 132 (7.0)                           |
| Balance risk and benefit| 17 (94)                       | 135 (7.2)                           |
| Research priorities     | 18 (100)                      | 341 (18.1)                          |
| Necessary research      | 17 (94)                       | 235 (12.5)                          |
| Data from any scientific method | 15 (83)     | 61 (3.2)                             |

Table 4: Illustrative quotes for dominant subthemes

| Theme                  | Subtheme                | Illustrative quote                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Access                 | Authorization burden    | [There is a] lack of consistency from one licensed producer to another, content is not the same [which is different from other therapeutics]. The therapy and content might be different one batch to other. It’s almost like witchcraft in some way. (Participant 02) Money is the biggest [equity concern]. … For a child [for whom] I would [authorize] or think of [authorizing medical cannabis], if the family doesn’t have … ways of getting it, then we’re stuck. (Participant 05) |
| Relationships and relational autonomy | Clinical communication | Just being very transparent with families is important, and letting them know … the evidence that you have for it [cannabis], certain scenarios that you think it is beneficial in and why directly for the patient you think it is a good or it’s beneficial or not beneficial. And then, helping to dispel some of their disbeliefs and asking … what their knowledge is of medical cannabis. (Participant 09) It’s really the parents who are making the third-party decision whether [the child is] neurologically intact or not. The only difference is when we’re dealing more with adolescents … they’re more capable. We definitely bring them in for the conversation because … they’re capable. (Participant 05) |
| Medically appropriate use | Risk–benefit calculus | You start out with your most tried and true treatments and then you work up. Now, that’s the approach in practice; what that means is the patients who are most severe are most likely to reach third-, fourth-line treatments. So, they would be more likely to be offered cannabis, but I’m not offering it because they’re severe. I’m offering it because first-, second-line treatments [have] failed. (Participant 03) |
| Research priorities   | Necessary research      | I don’t think you need to have a direct comparison for efficacy … Is it safe in the context … even sort of more qualitative things would be fine. (Participant 07) I don’t even know that [evidence] needs to be at the randomized controlled trial level. We don’t even have well-designed prospective trials, we don’t have well-designed retrospective trials, we don’t have anything to go by. (Participant 18) |
Relationships and relational autonomy

Relationships and relational autonomy was the second most commonly referenced theme (18 interviews [100%]; 526 coded references [28%]). The main subtheme was clinical communication defined by an individualist approach: participants explained that they try to build conversations around patient and caregiver needs and beliefs as much as possible, while stressing the need for bidirectional judgment-free honesty and trust (Table 4). Minor factors (< 5.0% coded references) were the importance of data transparency, and obtaining informed consent from the patient or the surrogate decision-maker.

Two additional subthemes were demonstrating clinical support (17 interviews [94%]; 112 coded references [5.9%]) and addressing communication that patients and families receive from outside clinical settings (e.g., friends, Internet) (18 interviews [100%]; 101 coded references [5.4%]). In the context of clinical support, participants expressed a need to follow the wishes of the patient and the caregiver, even if those wishes were not supported by current medical evidence, as well as the responsibility to educate themselves and to provide referrals. They further discussed correcting misconceptions and misperceptions about medical cannabis that can arise from nonclinical sources of communication.

Medically appropriate use

The third most commonly referenced theme was medically appropriate use (18 interviews [100%]; 487 coded references [25.8%]). Risk–benefit calculus was dominant here, with potential harms of medical use compared to expected benefits (Table 4). Participants cited specific harms, including negative impacts on neurodevelopment, drug–drug interactions and the potential for addiction. Benefits pertained to improvements in quality of life and reducing harms in a safely monitored way. Medical considerations that could mitigate risks were the number of tried and failed therapeutic attempts, a life-limiting prognosis, the presence of severe symptoms and a shorter duration of use (Table 5).

The subtheme of evidence-based treatment outlined the conditions for which medical cannabis may be considered an appropriate treatment option, not as a first-line option but, rather, as a low-priority symptom management tool. Commonly cited treatment contexts included cancer-related symptoms, seizure disorders, chronic nausea and chronic pain.

Consumption captured clinical deliberation over the formulation (Δ-9-tetrahydrocannabinol–cannabidiol ratio) and route of administration. Nuances of dosing and recommendations against smoking dominated this subtheme.

Research priorities

Participants believed that research was necessary for authorization of medical cannabis to children, expressing an urgency for more data in general, from any scientific method, in any population (Table 4). They expressed that studies directed at specific and diverse pediatric populations and conditions, as well as systematic investigations of adverse effects, efficacy, safety and dosing, would raise the evidentiary standard for medical cannabis to the standard to which therapeutics are generally held (Table 6). More than half of participants (n = 13) expressed the need for randomized controlled clinical trials.

The subthemes of barriers to research and research ethics each represented less than 5.0% of coded references but reflected important concerns for developing future studies. Barriers to research included funding difficulties and study design considerations. Research ethics focused on the obligation to conduct studies in pediatric populations and special ethical considerations therein, such as a greater respect for impact on neurodevelopment.

Interpretation

The clinicians who participated in our study were critical of Canada’s medical cannabis landscape, expressing that regulatory obstacles impose downstream challenges to safe and controlled access for pediatric patients. Medical cannabis is held to the same evidence-based, biomedical standards as other treatments but cannot currently meet them. Participants identified a need to address access barriers and conduct further research. The ethics values that affect clinical decision-making about medical cannabis are perhaps unsurprising and reflect the importance of evidence-based treatment decisions, risk–benefit calculus, respecting relationships and autonomy, and informed choice. The findings highlight the significance of

**Table 5: Medical considerations affecting risk–benefit calculus and the decision to authorize medical cannabis**

| Medical profile characteristic | No. (%) of interviews | No. (%) of coded references |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| No. of therapeutic attempts   | 16 (89)               | 46 (2.4)                   |
| Prognosis                     | 16 (89)               | 46 (2.4)                   |
| Symptom severity              | 13 (72)               | 25 (1.3)                   |
| Duration of use               | 3 (17)                | 3 (0.2)                    |

**Table 6: Research necessary for clinical consideration of authorizing medical cannabis**

| Factor                      | No. (%) of interviews | No. (%) of coded references |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Data from any scientific method | 15 (83)               | 61 (3.2)                    |
| Appropriate use             | 10 (56)               | 42 (2.2)                    |
| Adverse effects             | 11 (61)               | 41 (2.2)                    |
| Efficacy                    | 10 (56)               | 23 (1.2)                    |
| Safety                      | 10 (56)               | 23 (1.2)                    |
| Randomized controlled clinical trials | 13 (72)               | 19 (1.0)                    |
| Dosing                      | 9 (50)                | 19 (1.0)                    |
interpersonal values such as quality of life in end-of-life and oncology settings,7,13 and the need for methodologically sound systematic studies.7,19,21–24

The results of this study align with those of previous studies of clinician attitudes toward medical cannabis. Concerns remain about barriers to access, including supply, quality and financial burdens, identified in surveys among Canadian clinicians before legalization.5,6,16,40 Insufficient regulations and policies continue to place a disproportionate responsibility on clinicians and create additional access barriers.21,23,24 For example, medical cannabis has not undergone Health Canada’s drug review and approval process and lacks a Drug Identification Number, which means that it has to be authorized, not prescribed. This has ramifications for clinicians, insurance providers, and patients or caregivers.4,37

Seminal to our findings is the potential benefit of a harm-reduction approach to manage behaviours that pose a risk to health in societal and clinical settings.13,41–43 For example, harm-reduction techniques have been applied to reduce problematic use of substances including cannabis by youth.31–45 Medical cannabis itself has been used as a substitute for prescription opioids and other drugs to reduce harm.36–40

Taken as a narrative whole, the present findings reflect harm-reduction principles of pragmatism, humanism, focus on harms and prioritization of immediate goals.12,13 Participants acknowledged that pediatric patients may use cannabis for perceived medical purposes regardless of access barriers. The results show that, in the face of pragmatic use, clinicians can use harm-reduction strategies to prioritize patient safety. Clinicians take a humanistic approach in recognizing patients’ rights to medical cannabis, and in striving for open and transparent communication. To mitigate risks, clinicians guide patients through treatment options with strong evidence before considering medical cannabis as a symptom-management tool. By understanding when and how patient medical profiles may allow potential benefits of medical cannabis to outweigh risks, clinicians are able to prioritize immediate treatment goals.

The expressed need for data, considered federal regulations and a harm-reduction approach support interdisciplinarity in the quest to resolve issues in Canada’s medical cannabis system. Legislator, clinician, patient and key stakeholder views are critical to negotiate a system that aligns medical cannabis with treatment standards that do not violate rights to access and safeguards patient health. Many critical issues remain to be explored and addressed, including standardization of products available to patients and researchers, clinician education on dosing and adverse effects of medical cannabis, and clinical communication approaches that are patient-centred and culturally sensitive.

Limitations
We were unable to recruit participants who do not consider authorizing medical cannabis, and diversity was limited. We did not return transcripts to participants and did not conduct member-checking. It is possible that bias was introduced owing to views and perspectives of the coders, who are both white and of European background. We did not assess the impact of patient demographic characteristics such as age and gender on clinician decision to authorize. The method of semi-structured interviewing yields a holistic, narrative understanding of a topic but, by its nature, evolves during data collection.

Conclusion
Canadian clinicians described a treatment landscape for pediatric use of medical cannabis that is in need of reform. Current circumstances are fuelled by ineffective federal policies that prevent quality assurance but allow for indirect access without clinician involvement. Although clinicians reported approaching this landscape using a pragmatic harm-reduction strategy, this is untenable as a long-term solution. Changes to regulations and more research are necessary to improve the care of children and youth whose medical needs may include cannabis products.

References
1. Cox C. Implications of the 2018 Canadian Cannabis Act. Should regulation differ for medicinal and non-medicinal cannabis use? Health Policy 2021;125:12–6.
2. Cox C. The Canadian Cannabis Act legalizes and regulates recreational cannabis use in 2018. Healthc Policy 2018;122:205–9.
3. Fischer B, Kuganesan S, Roon R. Medical marijuana programs: implications for cannabis control policy — observations from Canada. Int J Drug Policy 2015;26:15–9.
4. Rieder M. Authorizing medical cannabis for children. Paediatr Child Health 2020;25(Suppl 1):S34–5.
5. Gilbard M, Mount D, Rassekh SR, et al. Family attitudes about and experiences with medical cannabis in children with cancer or epilepsy: an exploratory qualitative study. CMAJ Open 2021;9:E563–9.
6. Martin JH, Hall W, Frithcaches MA, et al. Ensuring access to safe, effective, and affordable cannabis-based medicines. Br J Clin Pharmacol 2020;86:630–4.
7. Ananth P, Ma C, Al-Sayegh H, et al. Provider perspectives on use of medical cannabis in children with cancer. Pediatr 2018;141:e20170559.
8. Duval SW, Lindly OD, Zuckerman K, et al. Ethical implications for providers regarding cannabis use in children with autism spectrum disorders. Pediatr 2019;143:e20180558.
9. Elliott J, DeJean D, Cliford T, et al. Cannabis for pediatric epilepsy: protocol for a living systematic review. Syst Rev 2018;7:95.
10. Elliott J, DeJean D, Potter BK, et al. Barriers in accessing medical cannabis for children with drug-resistant epilepsy in Canada: a qualitative study. Epilepsy Behav 2020;111:107120.
11. Trzaskol M, Uhel-Siboni S, Linder I, et al. CBD-enriched medical cannabis for intractable pediatric epilepsy: the current Israeli experience. Seizure 2016;35:41–4.
12. Denis-Lalonde D, Lind C, Estefan A. Beyond the buzzword: a concept analysis of harm reduction. Res Theory Nurs Pract 2019;3:130–23.
13. Hawk M, Couter RWS, Egan JE, et al. Harm reduction principles for health-care settings. Harm Reduct J 2017;14:70.
14. Arnfinsen JL, Kisa A. Assessment of Norwegian physicians’ knowledge, experience and attitudes towards medical cannabis. Drugs Educ Prev Policy 2021;28:165–71.
15. Carlini BH, Garrett SB, Carter GT. Medicinal cannabis: a survey among health care providers in Washington State. Am J Hosp Palliat Care 2017;34:85–91.
16. Charuvastra A, Friedmann PD, Stein MD. Physician attitudes regarding the prescription of medical marijuana. J Addict Dis 2005;24:87–93.
17. Crowley D, Collins C, Delargy I, et al. Irish general practitioner attitudes toward decriminalisation and medical use of cannabis: results from a national survey. Harm Reduct J 2017;14:44.
18. Sideris A, Khan F, Boltonova A, et al. New York physicians’ perspectives and knowledge of the state medical marijuana program. Cannabis Cannabinoid Res 2019;4:74–84.
19. Zolotov Y, Vulfsom S, Zarhin D, et al. Medical cannabis: An oxymoron? Physicians’ perceptions of medical cannabis. Int J Drug Policy 2018;57:4–10.
20. Komradl F, Reid A. Colorado family physicians’ attitudes toward medical marijuana. J Am Board Fam Med 2013;26:32–40.
21. Urruty TJ, McPherson ML, Pradel F. Assessment of hospice health professionals’ knowledge, views, and experience with medical marijuana. J Palliat Med 2011;14:1291–5.
22. Zolotov Y, Vulfsom S, Smitsman S. Predicting physicians’ intentions to recommend medical cannabis. J Pain Symptom Manage 2019;58:400-7.
23. Ko GD, Bohrer SL, Minda S, et al. Medical cannabis: the Canadian perspective. J Pain Res 2016;9:735–44.
24. Ziemianski D, Capler R, Tekanof R, et al. Cannabis in medicine: a national educational needs assessment among Canadian physicians. BMC Med Educ 2015;15:52.
25. Miller FG, Frie JJ, Bacchetta MD. Clinical pragmatism: John Dewey and clinical ethics. J Contemp Health Law Policy 1996;13:37-51.
26. Pavaran G, Singh I. Pragmatic neuroethics: lived experiences as a source of moral knowledge. Can Q Health Ethics 2018;27:578-89.
27. Racine E. Interdisciplinary approaches for a pragmatic neuroethics. Am J Bioeth 2008;8:52-3.
28. Racine E, Bell E, Di Pietro NC, et al. Evidence-based neuroethics for neurodevelopmental disorders. Semin Pediatr Neurol 2011;18:21-5.
29. De Jonghe Debeer M, Vauthign L. Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: a balance of relationship and rigour. Fam Med Community Health 2019;7:400057.
30. Tong A, Sainsbury P, Craig J. Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): a 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. Int J Qual Health Care 2007;19:346-57.
31. Hsieh HF, Shannon SE. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. Qual Health Res 2005;15:1277-88.
32. Cabrera LY, Bittlinger M, Lou H, et al. The re-emergence of psychiatric neuroethics: a cross-country cross-cutting study. Acta Neurochir (Wien) 2018;160:625-35.
33. Munjal V, Arakelyan M, McDonald PJ, et al. Epilepsy through the eyes of the media: a paradox of positive reporting and challenges of access to advanced neurotechnology. Epilepsy Behav 2020;111:107200.
34. Sharpe K, Di Pietro N, Illes J. In the know and in the news: how science and the media communicate about stem cells, autism and cerebral palsy. Stem Cell Rev Rep 2016;12:1-7.
35. Benjaminy S, Lo C, Illes J. Social responsibility in stem cell research: Is the media all bad? Stem Cell Rev Rep 2016;12:269-75.
36. Balneaves LG, Alraja AA. “Guarding their practice”: a descriptive study of Canadian nurse practitioners regarding cannabis for therapeutic purposes. Can J Cannabis Sci Res 2018;3:66-73.
37. Ware MA. Medical cannabis research: issues and priorities. Neuropsychopharmacology 2018;43:214-5.
38. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine; Health and Medicine Division; Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice; Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana: an Evidence Review and Research Agenda. Challenges and barriers in conducting cannabis research. In: The health effects of cannabis and cannabinoids: the current state of evidence and recommendations for research. Consensus Study Report. Washington: National Academies Press; 2017. Available: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK423757/ (accessed 2021 June 3).
39. Porter BE, Jacobson C. Report of a parent survey of cannabidiol-enriched cannabis use in pediatric treatment-resistant epilepsy. Epilepsy Behav 2013;29:574-7.
40. Balneaves LG, Alraja AA. “Guarding their practice”: a descriptive study of Canadian nursing policies and education related to medical cannabis. BMC Nurs 2019;18:66.
41. Sharma M, Lamba W, Cauderella A, et al. Harm reduction in hospitals. Harm Reduct J 2017;14:12.
42. Lewis E. Access and ethics: medical cannabis perspectives — a roundtable. Medical Cannabis Clinicians Society; 2021. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doszw6Z-uao (accessed 2021 Feb. 10).
43. Jenkins EK, Semon A, Haines-Saad RJ. Developing harm reduction in the context of youth substance use: insights from a multi-site qualitative analysis of young people’s harm minimization strategies. Harm Reduct J 2017;14:53.
44. Stockings E, Hall WD, Lynskey M, et al. Prevention, early intervention, harm reduction, and treatment of substance use in young people. Lancet Psychiatry 2016;3:280-96.
45. Lucas P, Walsh Z. Medical cannabis access, use, and substitution for prescription opioids and other substances: a survey of authorized medical cannabis patients. Int J Drug Policy 2017;42:30-5.
46. Lucas P, Baron EP, Jikomes N. Medical cannabis patterns of use and substitution for opioids & other pharmaceutical drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and illicit substances; results from a cross-sectional survey of authorized patients. Harm Reduct J 2019;16:9.
47. Lucas P, Boyd S, Milloy MJ, et al. Cannabis significantly reduces the use of prescription opioids and improves quality of life in authorized patients: results of a large prospective study. Pain Med 2021;22:727-39.

Affiliations: Neuroethics Canada (Gunning, Rotenberg, Illes), Division of Neurology, Department of Medicine, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC; Department of Pediatrics and Child Health (Kelly), University of Manitoba; George & Fay Yee Centre for Healthcare Innovation (Kelly), Winnipeg, Man.; Division of Hematology-Oncology (Crooks), Department of Pediatrics, IWK Health Centre, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS; Department of Pediatric Hematology-Onco-Oncology-BMT (Oberoi), CancerCare Manitoba, Winnipeg, Man.; Departments of Pediatrics and of Family and Community Medicine (Rapoport), Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto; Emily’s House Children’s Hospice (Rapoport), Toronto, Ont.; Division of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology/BMT (Rassekh), Department of Pediatrics, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC.

Contributors: The following authors contributed equally (in alphabetical order): Bruce Crooks, Sapna Oberoi, Adam Rapoport and Rod Rassekh, Judy Illes, Lauren Kelly, Margot Gunning, Adam Rapoport, Rod Rassekh, Sapna Oberoi and Bruce Crooks conceived and designed the study. Margot Gunning acquired the data. Margot Gunning and Ari Rotenberg analyzed the data. Margot Gunning, Ari Rotenberg and Judy Illes interpreted the data and drafted the manuscript. All of the authors reviewed the manuscript critically for important intellectual content, approved the final version to be published and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Funding: This work was supported by grant 707031 to Lauren Kelly from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Canadian Cancer Society.

Content licence: This is an Open Access article distributed in accordance with the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original publication is properly cited, the use is noncommercial (i.e., research or educational use), and no modifications or adaptations are made. See: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Data sharing: Raw interview data and field notes are not publicly available owing to privacy considerations.

Acknowledgements: The authors thank the participants for volunteering their time, members of the Canadian Childhood Cannabinoid Clinical Trials team for feedback on study design, and Neuroethics Canada for assistance with data analysis and feedback on the results.

Supplemental information: For reviewer comments and the original submission of this manuscript, please see www.cmajopen.ca/content/10/1/E196/suppl/DC1.