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Cannabis Use and its Impact on Prescription Opioid Use

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Abstract: One of the promising uses for medical cannabis is treating chronic pain by reduce prescription opioids thus reducing the number of overdoses and deaths. Due to the legal status of cannabis, there has been little research into its efficacy for reducing opioids, or the optimal dosing. To determine the impact cannabis has on reducing prescription opioids, we combined dispensary sales and opioid prescription data, de-identifying and matching the data on an individual level while maintaining the privacy of protected health information. Looking at patient histories over a period of three years (2019 – 21) we analyzed whether more opioids were prescribed before the first cannabis purchase, during the period when cannabis was being purchased, or after the final cannabis purchase. While individuals may have unexpected life events that require prescription opioids at any time, averaging over hundreds of patients measures whether cannabis is a practical means for reducing opioids as pain medication. The results showed a reduction of 30% in prescription opioids during the period when patients were purchasing cannabis products. We then divided the patients into two groups: those who reduced their opioid use while using cannabis and those who saw no reduction. Comparing both groups against the average dispensary customer we compared total spend on cannabis products per month, mg of THC purchased per month, and the distribution of patient spending across different forms of cannabis. There were significant differences between the two groups, and relative to the average.