CANNABIS

Treating patients who use cannabis

BACKGROUND

What should you do if a patient comes for treatment and you suspect he or she is under the influence of cannabis? How can such a patient provide informed consent? These issues will face dentists more and more with the legalization of medicinal and recreational cannabis use.

DETERMINING CANNABIS INTOXICATION

No government-regulated standardization of potency and purity related to cannabis is currently available. As a result, dentists and other care providers have no definitive way to determine the level of intoxication of a patient. Even measuring the blood concentration of the active ingredient in cannabis provides no consistent indication of impairment. Dentists are left to make a judgment as to the patient's level of intoxication based on common clinical signs of cannabis use. These include dizziness or trouble walking; red, bloodshot, or glazed eyes; silliness or giggling for no reason; anxiety; paranoia; and difficulty remembering things that just happened.

CRITERIA FOR INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent is an essential part of the ethical practice of dentistry, reflecting the protection of the patient's rights to agree to treatment. Dentists must fully explain the treatment, all reasonable alternatives, and the risks of treatment and of not delivering treatment. Patients must be sufficiently coherent to accurately understand what the dentist is telling them about the treatments and risks. Dentists are the ones who must assess whether the patient has that level of understanding. The entire process should be documented, also noting the reasons why the patient was deemed competent or incompetent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Dentists should be familiar with the signs and symptoms of patients who are impaired because of the use of cannabis or other agents. This includes staying current with the findings related to cannabis use and misuse so that they can share the information with patients. Patients should be informed about the effects related to cannabis toxicity, especially those related to oral health.

Clinical Significance

Until definitive methods are developed to accurately measure cannabis intoxication levels, the dentist must rely on his or her observation of signs and symptoms of toxicity. As for other drug impairment situations, patients should only be treated when they can provide informed consent to procedures. Dentists must document their thought process to indicate how he or she carefully considered the patient's competence to provide such consent.

Calilung XM: Patients under the influence of cannabis: Should you treat them in the office? *J Calif Dent Assoc* 47:131, 2019

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COMMUNICATION

Creating a top-producing practice

BACKGROUND

Creating a team that is functioning optimally relies on the presence of mutual respect between the team and the dentist in 5 specific areas. These include communicating expectations, valuing the contributions of team members, rewarding them for showing initiative, placing people where their personal strengths lie, and handling team members' mistakes properly.

EXPECTATIONS

Dentists must fulfill their communication roles as mentor, motivator, and monitor for their dental teams. Mentoring includes communicating the specific direction and focus for the practice, which is expressed in a written mission statement. This statement should be crafted through the express ideas of the dentist as well as those of the team. Having such