

# Perception of Maltese healthcare professionals on cannabis for medicinal use

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## INTRODUCTION

Cannabis sativa is a plant containing 2 major components: cannabidiol which exerts pharmacological properties without the psychotropic properties exhibited by the second major component, tetrahydrocannabinol.

In Malta, the Drugs Dependence (Treatment Not Imprisonment) Act was amended in 2018 to allow prescribing by doctors and dispensing by pharmacists of medicinal cannabis products.

## AIM

To assess the perceptions and concerns of Maltese doctors and pharmacists on the clinical use of medicinal cannabis subsequently identifying gaps that need to be addressed to support healthcare professionals as necessary.

## METHOD

- A 25-item questionnaire entitled: 'The Healthcare Professionals Questionnaire on use of medicinal cannabis' was developed and validated by an expert panel.
- Disseminated via Google Forms to registered healthcare professionals in Malta.
- The study was granted Ethics approval.

### *Themes covered by the Questionnaire:*

- ✓ Demographics
- ✓ Profession
- ✓ Knowledge about benefits to patients
- ✓ Discussing medicinal cannabis with patients
- ✓ Prescribing medicinal cannabis
- ✓ Clinical conditions and medicinal cannabis
- ✓ Concerns about medicinal cannabis in practice
- ✓ Educational needs about medicinal cannabis

## RESULTS

- 200 respondents consisting of 98 doctors, 88 pharmacists and 14 other healthcare professionals answered the questionnaire.
- 130 respondents agreed that patients can benefit from medicinal cannabis.
- 127 respondents stated that they would feel comfortable discussing the clinical use of medicinal cannabis with patients, while 81 agreed that medicinal cannabis had therapeutic benefits.
- 63 participants were aware of the side effects of medicinal cannabis.
- 183 respondents agreed that there is not enough knowledge about medicinal cannabis among the public.
- 120 respondents strongly agreed that pharmacy and medical students need to be given better education and training about medicinal cannabis in their respective curricula.
- 174 respondents agreed that they were willing to attend educational initiatives to strengthen their knowledge about medicinal cannabis.

## CONCLUSION

Healthcare professionals agreed on the beneficial use of medicinal cannabis, but it was a tepid acceptance as many see the need for enhanced education on the subject, for themselves and patients. Developing an academic platform to support sharing of expertise and support healthcare professionals in decision making with relation to medicinal cannabis may be useful to healthcare professionals and patients.