

Media Release



The Sydney
children's
Hospitals Network

care, advocacy, research, education

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Research is key in safe use of medicinal cannabis

Safety should be the top priority when deciding to treat paediatric epilepsy with medicinal cannabis, according to an article published in the Medical Journal of Australia (MJA) today.

Cannabis for Paediatric Epilepsy: challenges and conundrums is the first account of the efficacies and complexities of using medicinal cannabis to treat Australian children with severe, treatment-resistant epilepsy.

Dr John Lawson, Paediatric Neurologist at Sydney Children's Hospital Randwick, and one of the article's authors, said while medicinal cannabis, specifically the cannabidiol component, has emerged as a potential new medicine for very sick children with epilepsy, the full long-term effects and risks are not yet known.

"Yes, cannabidiol may be a treatment option, but high quality trial data and adequate scientific evidence is needed to guide medical decisions, policy and legislation," Dr Lawson said.

"Cannabidiol should be seen as and treated like any other medicine. We need to know that it will be safe to give your child, and we need to have clear dosing instructions. We do not have this certainty around many cannabis-based medicines currently being used by some parents, which can put children at risk."

Dr Lawson said the article also highlights the interplay this growing research has with social influences, including media reports of miracle cures and the call for reform, which further complicates the landscape and breeds misconceptions that can put families at risk.

"Each week in clinic I see many families with children with severe epilepsy, desperately seeking a solution," Dr Lawson said.

"However to date, only one single recent randomised-placebo controlled trial of cannabidiol in 120 children or young adults with Dravet Syndrome demonstrated an improvement in convulsive seizure frequency. Other clinical studies are limited, with methodological inconsistencies and flaws, particularly with the use of non-pharmaceutical grade products."

The NSW Government has committed \$3.5 million towards research into the use of cannabis medicines for children with severe, treatment-resistant refractory epilepsy as part of its \$21 million

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investment in exploring the therapeutic potential of medicinal cannabis, including world-first clinical trials.

As part of this, Dr Lawson, on behalf of Sydney Children's Hospitals Network, is leading the Compassionate Access Scheme for Epidiolex(R), and Australian involvement in international clinical trials for children with Tuberous Sclerosis Complex and Dravet Syndrome using Epidiolex(R).

The Network is also involved in the development of clinical trials for children with Rett Syndrome using a novel medicinal cannabis product called Cannabidivarin (CBDV).

Media enquiries

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