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Nabilone for the Management of Pain.

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Abstract

Nabilone, a synthetic cannabinoid, is approved in many countries including, but not limited to, Canada, the United States, Mexico, and the United Kingdom for the treatment of severe nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy. Clinical evidence is emerging for its use in managing pain conditions with different etiologies. We review the efficacy and safety of nabilone for various types of pain as well as its abuse potential, precautions and contraindications, and drug interactions; summarize pertinent clinical practice guidelines; and provide recommendations for dosing, monitoring, and patient education. Citations involving nabilone were identified through systematic reviews evaluating cannabinoids for pain. A systematic search (updated July 23, 2015) of the Ovid MEDLINE, EMBASE, PubMed, and Cochrane Library databases was performed. Eight randomized controlled trials, two prospective cohort trials, and one retrospective chart review were retrieved. Cancer pain, chronic noncancer pain, neuropathic pain, fibromyalgia, and pain associated with spasticity were the pain conditions evaluated. Nabilone was most commonly used as adjunctive therapy and led to small but significant reductions in pain. The most common adverse drug reactions included euphoria, drowsiness, and dizziness. Nabilone was rarely associated with severe adverse drug reactions requiring drug discontinuation, and the likelihood of abuse was thought to be low. Although the optimal role of nabilone in the management of pain is yet to be determined, certain clinical practice guidelines consider nabilone as a third-line agent.

KEYWORDS: abuse; cannabinoids; efficacy; nabilone; pain; review; safety

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