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What Do Contemporary Cannabinoid Studies Mean to the Medical Cannabis Movement?

BY DR. JEFF G. KONIN

Recently van Breemen et al. from Oregon State University published a study titled “Cannabinoids Block Cellular Entry of SARS-CoV-2 and the Emerging Variants” in the *Journal of Natural Products*. Published in a journal that likely even the most devoted of cannabis supporters do not read on a regular basis, this article swept the headlines of news agencies around the world. Why? Because the results show in a controlled in vitro environment that two cannabinoids (CBGA and CBDA) possess ligands with high affinity to the receptors where SARS-CoV-2 binds, serving as entry inhibitors and therefore preventing potential infection of the virus.

Further clinical phased trials are needed to determine the efficacy and safety of similar interventions in humans before we jump to conclusions and make false claims regarding the meaning and interpretation of this study. However, in a world grasping for solutions to the current pandemic, a glimmer of promise is pleasantly welcomed. The glimmer comes in the form of timely and quality research. To some, this also comes as a surprise that part of the natural cannabis plant may be a viable medical solution to what is arguably the largest global healthcare crisis in most of our lifetimes. Yet to others this is seen as an opportunity to spread the word that the cannabis plant does have natural benefits that remain to be seen and accepted in traditional modern medicine.

In the United States, many barriers exist that prevent much-needed cannabis-related research to occur. Research studies begin with a question. It could be a “why?” as in “why does this do what it does?” It could be a “how?” as in “How does this do what it does?” When it comes to cannabis as a medical intervention, there are many “why’s” and “how’s”. There are also many researchers, practitioners, educators, and especially patients who want to know the answers to the many questions surrounding the mystery of the cannabis plant. In fact, even those who condemn all things cannabis would benefit from knowing as much scientific fact as possible. If there are dangers and side effects, we all want to know. If there are benefits, we for sure all want to know.

Why is this particular study of such importance? It is important on so many levels. Let's begin with the obvious: it is a positive story about cannabis that has sparked the interest of the media. The majority of media stories shared about cannabis have a negative angle. And the fact that it is positive and timely to a condition that



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nobody has truly seemed to find a great solution for makes it an interesting story to share with the public. The positive outcome of this initial work establishes and justifies continued work to advance the science in this area. Of course, the hope is that the laboratory studies have future clinical and translational impact.

Yet there is a greater effect that this study potentially has that reaches far beyond a potential COVID solution. Imagine, just imagine, if a cannabinoid is found to be a medically acceptable intervention or viable preventative approach. In addition to the openly receptive and perhaps even enthusiastically requested thirst for the successful cannabinoid, individuals from all facets of life may begin to wonder if components of the cannabis plant that some people have been claiming for years have medicinal value

may in fact be true. Perhaps more patients would inquire about cannabis for their ailing short and long-term health conditions. Researchers might find increased amount of funding available for meaningful studies with less red tape to navigate through. Practitioners would listen to patients and adhere to their responsibility of knowing how cannabis works, for what conditions, in what dosages, etc... Educators in all walks of life from public health to business and marketing would be taught in school the most current information. In essence, what Malcolm Gladwell eloquently refers to as “The Tipping Point” will have been reached.

This is a single study and rarely does a single scientific study serve to create cultural change. It is not likely this study will either. However, this study dominated a news cycle and helped to bring to the attention of the general public a positive study about cannabis in an extremely timely manner for an extremely important topic. Today covid. Tomorrow cancer? As more quality research is not only conducted but also disseminated, whatever effects cannabis has on the health of individuals will ultimately be known to all.

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