

TRANSPLANTATION

Marijuana use does not affect survival in liver transplant recipients

Liver transplant candidates who use marijuana are not at an increased risk of mortality, say a group of researchers in the US.

“Current substance abuse policies do not seem to ... expose marijuana users to additional risk of mortality...”

Individuals who use the drug are often excluded from liver transplantation waiting lists, and are required to complete 6 months of drug abstinence, monitoring and counseling before being considered as a candidate for transplantation. Dr Englesbe and his team of researchers from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, comprehensively investigated the effects of marijuana use in patients with chronic

liver disease. Englesbe was concerned that “current substance abuse policies may be preventing otherwise good liver transplant candidates from receiving a life-saving transplant simply because they use marijuana. A lot of individuals who need a transplant need one quickly, and a 6-month delay might not be appropriate.”

The study was designed to determine the independent effects of marijuana use on outcome in patients receiving a liver transplantation. The outcomes of 1,334 transplant candidates, of whom 155 were marijuana users, were assessed. The authors hypothesized that marijuana users would have inferior survival compared with nonusers; however, survival rates were found to be similar between users and nonusers.

These findings are important, considering the growing legalized, medicinal use of marijuana. “Current



substance abuse policies do not seem to systematically expose marijuana users to additional risk of mortality,” the researchers conclude.

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Original article Ranney, D. N. et al. Marijuana use in potential liver transplant candidates. *Am. J. Transplant.* 9, 280–285 (2009).