Proceedings of the inaugural meeting of the Canadian Consortium for the Investigation of Cannabinoids

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CANNABINOID RESEARCH

There is a significant body of research regarding cannabinoids. It is well established that there is an extensive endogenous cannabinoid system with peripheral and central components and multiple actions, with the potential for treating human health problems. The articles in this issue of *Pain Research & Management* present a review of the work relevant to pain, as well as other key areas such as spasticity, nausea, vomiting and appetite stimulation. Each of the authors are considered to be the leading experts in their fields of study, and a short biographical description appears in the footnote of each article. The papers by Drs Kalant (pages 80-91), Mechoulam (pages 67-73) and Walker (pages 74-79) present a review of the history and pharmacology of cannabinoids along with focused reviews in key areas, including pain, spasticity, nausea, vomiting and appetite stimulation. Dr Klein (pages 95-101) presents a comprehensive review of the literature examining cannabinoid actions on the immune system; he identifies cannabinoids as immune modulators with multiple and complex actions requiring further research but with the potential for exploitation in the future management of human disease.

Internationally, it has been acknowledged that further research regarding cannabinoids is needed. Dr Kalant, who served as chair of the World Health Organization Committee on Cannabis and Health from 1994 to 1998, presents a review of the findings of a number of major reviews regarding possible therapeutic uses of cannabis and cannabinoids. Dr Kalant notes that there is international agreement that cannabinoids deserve further study as potential therapeutic agents in the relief of human suffering and observes that pain has been identified as a significant area of potential interest.

CANADIAN CONSORTIUM FOR THE INVESTIGATION OF CANNABINOIDS IN HUMAN THERAPEUTICS

It was for this reason that the Canadian Consortium for the Investigation of Cannabinoids in Human Therapeutics (CCIC) was formed. The CCIC came together as a result of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) Opportunities Program. This program provided initial seed funding. The primary objective of the CCIC is to enhance the health of Canadians by using Canada's strong research community to assess the role of cannabinoids in the treatment of a variety of health conditions. The mission of the CCIC is to bring together key Canadian researchers who will pursue excellence in basic science and clinical research on the cannabinoid system.

Further funding has been provided by CIHR and Health Canada. To date, four meetings have been held. The CCIC is in the process of developing an infrastructure to support a national clinical trials network as well as support for an expanded program of basic science research.

An additional focus has included facilitating the regulatory requirements involved in cannabinoid research. To date, the sociopolitical context with strict regulatory control of cannabinoids, due to the association with marijuana, has limited human research in this area. We feel that Canada is in a unique position to lead the world in forging ahead with this necessary research to determine the role of cannabinoids in the health of Canadians. Health Canada has been very helpful in sending representatives to meetings. We are hopeful that this will further clarify and streamline the regulatory steps required for cannabinoid research.

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