Marijuana Treatment Encyclopedia Article

Marijuana Treatment

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Marijuana Treatment

Despite the popularity of marijuana in the United States, fairly little is known about how to treat individuals who become **dependent** on this drug. In addition, many heavy users of marijuana do not feel that they need treatment. Many research studies are investigating possible approaches to treatment. Currently, the most common form of treatment is through support groups. Marijuana Anonymous,□ (MA) a self-help fellowship based on the principles and traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous,□ exist in a number of states and around the world. In addition to in-person meetings, MA sessions are also held online.

%See Organizations of Interest at the back of Volume 2 for address, telephone, and URL.

Biological Factors

Advances in the scientific understanding of brain chemistry have provided considerable evidence that marijuana dependence is determined by biological factors. Scientists have identified a specific area of the brain that the active chemicals in marijuana attach to and affect. Knowing this information will make it possible to study the effects of long-term marijuana use.

There is some evidence that genes determine whether a marijuana user will become dependent. In a study of more than 8,000 male twins, genes were shown to influence whether a person finds the effects of marijuana use pleasant. A study of females had similar findings. While factors in an individual's social environment (such as whether someone's friends, roommates, or family members use marijuana) clearly influence whether he or she ever tries marijuana, becoming a heavy user or abuser may be more determined by biological factors, perhaps involving a part of the brain known as the limbic system. Research in this area may eventually identify who is most at risk for marijuana dependence. People may be able to use this information to make decisions about their own use of this drug. As knowledge of human biology expands, the treatment of marijuana dependence is also likely to take new paths.

The number of people admitted to substance abuse programs who named marijuana as their primary drug of abuse rose steadily throughout the mid-1990s.

See Also

Brain Structures; Marijuana.