Do you have any personal biases against the recreational or medicinal use of cannabis that would interfere with your professional responsibilities? Our life experiences and worldview inform our opinions and create bias. Yet, as regulated oral health care professionals, our obligation is to provide relevant, objective information from credible sources when communicating with clients, groups, and communities. We must always seek out appropriate, professional resources to acquire new knowledge and enhance our health promotion efforts.

On October 17, 2018, the federal Cannabis Act came into force to regulate recreational and medicinal cannabis use. Since the provinces and territories are responsible for developing, implementing, maintaining, and enforcing systems to oversee the distribution and sale of cannabis, it is important to stay up to date on the local laws. Ethically speaking, in the context of communicating with clients, groups, and communities about the oral implications of cannabis use, CDHA's Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics articulates the professional responsibilities of dental hygienists under the principles of “autonomy” and “integrity.” Specifically, dental hygienists help clients to make informed choices and to participate in achieving and maintaining optimal oral health by “communicating relevant information openly and truthfully” (autonomy). In addition, dental hygienists “maintain and advance their knowledge and skills in dental hygiene through lifelong learning” (integrity).

How can we determine which resources are directly relevant to our professional obligations and streamline our learning? The DH25 dental hygiene students at the Canadian National Institute of Health have curated a collection of 12 relevant and credible resources to assist you. These cannabis resources are found on Canadian regulatory authority websites, as well as government and professional association websites; many are authored by dental hygienists. The curated collection includes the cannabis monograph, fact sheets, posters, handouts, articles, and a webinar. All resources have been published between 2017 and 2019.
Title: Cannabis in Canada

Format: Webinar produced by the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association

Summary: Synopsis of the legislation governing the use of cannabis, how the endocannabinoid system works, oral signs and symptoms of cannabis use, and oral health recommendations to consider.


Title: Cannabis legalization and oral health – What dental hygienists need to know

Format: College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario Milestones article

Summary: Synthesis of pharmacology, general health effects, oral adverse effects, signs and symptoms that may affect dental hygiene care and examples of health history questions useful to determine client risk.

Title: Cannabis legalization and regulation

Format: Website of the Federal Department of Justice

Summary: Synthesis of the federal Cannabis Act S.C. 2018, c.16


Title: Front & Centre: Tobacco cessation in the era of e-cigarettes and legalized cannabis

Format: College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta InTouch article

Summary: Scholarly presentation of the federal and Alberta smoking cessation strategies and the current statistics of use; contribution of tobacco and cannabis to the development of oral disease; the role of dental health professionals in tobacco cessation including “the Adapted 5 A-Approach” (Els, 2019, p.14), and concrete recommendations for dental professionals to implement in their practice.


Continued...
Title: Why is my dental hygienist asking about my Cannabis use?

Format: Poster

Summary: This information sheet is published for the public by the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario to help clients understand why dental hygienists are asking about their cannabis use.


Title: Impaired in the chair? Cannabis and dental hygiene appointments

Format: Poster

Summary: Factors to consider when treating clients who use cannabis for recreational or medicinal purposes.


Title: Why is my dental hygienist asking about my Cannabis use?

Format: Handout

Summary: This information sheet is published for the public by the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario to help clients understand why dental hygienists are asking about their cannabis use.


Cannabis may alter the effectiveness of prescribed medications. Cannabis may increase bleeding and complicate dental hygiene care. Healing may also be affected.

Cannabis increases the heart rate and heightens anxiety. These side effects may worsen or last longer with anesthetics used for dental hygiene treatment.

Cannabis reduces saliva, leading to dry mouth. It also stimulates food cravings, which increase the amount of time your teeth are exposed to sugars. As a result, cannabis users have a higher risk of cavities, gum disease, and oral infections.

Fast heart rate and anxiety
Interaction with medications
Increased bleeding
Confusion and lack of focus
Dry mouth and the munchies
Cannabis use before a dental hygiene appointment may impair judgement and the capacity to provide consent to treatment.

Cannabis use has many side effects that vary based on the person and potency. These can have implications for both oral health and professional dental hygiene care. In some cases, dental hygiene appointments may need to be rescheduled to minimize risk. Consider the following side effects:

Impaired in the Chair?
Cannabis Use and Dental Hygiene Appointments
Have a conversation!
Cannabis use is an important part of the health record review. www.dentalhygienecanada.ca

Root of the matter:
Upcoming regulation changes – Legalization of non-medical cannabis.

Format: Access article published by the College of Dental Hygienists of British Columbia

Summary: Highlight the registrant’s responsibilities.

HONOURABLE MENTION:

The Blunt Truth

Title: #TheBluntTruth – useful tips about safer ways to use cannabis

Format: Pocket-sized guide produced by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Summary: The health promotion guide was developed for and by young people and provides science-based facts on cannabis and ten recommendations to reduce the risks of youth consumption.

The pocket-guide pamphlet is available for purchase at https://store-camh.myshopify.com/products/p6514-p6515


REFERENCES


CONCLUSION

Dental hygienists have many ethical obligations to clients, groups, communities, the profession, and to themselves. We anticipate that this curated collection of cannabis resources will serve your current knowledge needs and allow you to uphold the principles of integrity and autonomy insofar as conversations about cannabis in your practice are concerned.

The federal and provincial regulations are evolving and will change. In response, the profession will evolve as well. The College of Registered Dental Hygienists of Alberta already has a plan to gather information on cannabis in five distinct areas:

1. Fitness to practise of the registrants

2. Workplace policies and procedures to protect public safety

3. Standards of practice and ethical codes that ensure an informed consent from the client is obtained. Informed consent cannot be given by persons who are high on cannabis, alcohol or other drugs

4. Effects of cannabis on oral health and overall health, understanding the medical science behind any impacts of cannabis products, including cannabinoinds

5. Use of cannabis products, such as oils, in dental or dental hygiene treatment or for home use by clients.

We agree that there is plenty of research to be done!