Cannabis and Alcohol: Is there a relationship for drivers?

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Background: The 2007 National Roadside Survey identified cannabis as the most frequently identified drug found in the drivers, and of those individuals who entered Texas publicly-funded programs with at least one past-year DUI, 66% (22,666) had a primary problem with alcohol and 13% (4,438) had a primary problem with cannabis.

Aim: To examine the characteristics of these drivers at treatment admission who were primarily cannabis users as compared to those using cannabis and alcohol and those with a primary problem with alcohol.

Methods: A database of 56,717 treatment admissions of DUI drivers was examined using correlation and significance tests to determine differences in these individuals and to assess their risks for abstinence after completing treatment. Analysis was performed in SAS Version 9.2. All findings were significant at at p<.0001.

Results: Individuals with a problem with cannabis but no alcohol problems were younger had used their primary drug fewer years, were less likely to complete treatment, had lower income, had fewer substance abuse problems, and were more likely to be homeless, as well as more likely to be Hispanic.

Those who only had problems with alcohol were older, had been in treatment more times, had used more years, had more severe levels of impairment, but completed treatment and had higher incomes. Between these two extremes were those who had primary problems with cannabis and secondary with alcohol and those who had primary problems with alcohol and secondary with cannabis. As their problems with alcohol grew and problems with cannabis decreased, their severity increased in terms of ASI problems, employment, need for medications, emergency room visits, and non-DUI arrests.

Conclusions: Impaired drivers who first develop problems with cannabis appear to move along a continuum that includes adding alcohol as the second problem, then developing more problems with alcohol and less with cannabis, and finally having serious problems with alcohol. Use of these two drugs in various combinations of intensity is a factor that should be addressed during the individual’s drug using career with appropriate sanctions targeted to the combination of drugs to lessen driving under the influence.
Demographic Characteristics of Drivers Entering Treatment Based on Primary and Secondary Drug Problems: 2005-2009

Impairment Levels of Drivers Entering Treatment Based on Primary and Secondary Drug Problems: 2005-2009
Data tables will be included on the poster.