**Best Science (BS) Medicine Podcast:**
*Getting Higher than a Kite on Medical Cannabinoids*

https://therapeuticseducation.org/bs-medicine-podcast

The “Best Science (BS) Medicine Podcast” is a popular medical podcast that delves into the best available evidence to inform rational patient treatment in the primary care setting. In educating both patients and healthcare professionals, the podcast strives to enable patients to engage in shared and informed decision making.

The podcast is hosted by the Therapeutics Education Collaboration and presented by Dr James McCormack, a pharmacist and professor in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of British Columbia, and Dr Michael Allen, a family physician and professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Alberta. Healthcare providers themselves, the podcast hosts seek to critically evaluate the evidence and present it in a succinct manner to time-scarce individuals in the podcast medium. With 378 episodes to date, these podcasting veterans have covered a wide range of topics since their first episode in 2008. Most episodes focus on 1 particular medical issue (eg, obesity, anxiety, back pain), interspersed with episodes dedicated to wide-ranging listener questions. Some topics are covered in 1 episode, while others require a 2- to 4-episode series. Medical cannabinoids were recently covered in a 4-part series, “Getting Higher than a Kite on Medical Cannabinoids.” Medical cannabinoid use is a controversial topic, and the self-described “mythbusters” of drug therapy found medical cannabinoids to be promoted for a variety of conditions, even with a lack of high-level research to support their use. In this series they sought to determine exactly what was supported by the data.

The series begins by defining medical cannabinoids (medical marijuana and pharmaceutical cannabinoids) and the various routes of administration. Over the course of the series, the evidence for medical cannabinoid use is discussed and recommendations are made accordingly. The presenters and their colleagues conducted systematic reviews of randomized controlled trials (RCTs)—essentially meta-analyses of RCTs. Owing to the quality of evidence available, they focused on 4 clinical areas: pain, spasticity, nausea and vomiting, and adverse effects.

The hosts conclude that the use of medical marijuana is not supported by the evidence and recommend only very limited pharmaceutical cannabinoid use, in general. They suggest that use be limited to palliative and end-of-life pain, neuropathic pain, chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, and spasticity due to multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injury, and almost never as a first- or second-line treatment. Adverse events (side effects) are significantly higher for cannabinoids compared with placebo, and because many studies enrolled patients with a history of cannabinoid use, the benefit of intervention may be exaggerated, and the number of adverse events is almost certainly higher than currently suggested by the data. A corresponding research article and clinical practice guideline were published in a peer-reviewed journal, supporting the legitimacy of the claims and associated recommendations made in this cannabinoid series.

The hosts inject humor to the conversation (eg, suggesting that certain side effects such as “getting high” and euphoria may not be viewed negatively by all patients) to bring a more casual tone to their discussion of the evidence, engaging the audience even as the terminology becomes more technical as the details of clinical trials are discussed. For a listener not adept with clinical trial terminology, it may be difficult to fully comprehend on first listen, but with a few quick online searches, one can quickly get up to speed.

I found this series to be highly informative, well researched, and light enough to digest on an evening stroll. It may serve as a valuable resource in decision making for patient care.

To learn more, visit therapeuticseducation.org or subscribe to the podcast on iTunes or Podcast Addict (Android).

*Reviewer:* Hazel O’Connor, PhD

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**Organ Donation in Japan: A Medical Anthropological Study**

Maria-Keiko Yasuoka
Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015; Hardcover, 186 pages, $89.00

Although Japan boasts one of the finest health care systems in the world, organ transplants are far less common there than elsewhere. Many types of Japanese religious belief abhor the mutilation of the body, and while Japan was home to one of the world’s first heart transplants, it was a high-profile failure that raised serious ethical questions and led to a 30-year ban on organ transplants from the brain dead. In her book *Organ Donation in Japan: A Medical Anthropological Study*, Maria-Keiko Yasuoka explores Japanese feelings toward organ transplantation...