More bad news about medicinal marijuana to kill your buzz

By ACSH Staff — June 29, 2015

A new study published in JAMA reports that the labels on most edible marijuana products either overstate or understate the amount of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC -- the active component in cannabis) that they contain.

The results suggest that some patients who consume these products could therefore be unintentionally overdosing. On the other hand, products with too little THC may fail to deliver needed pain/symptom relief.

The researchers, led by Ryan Vandrey, PhD., associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, analyzed 75 different edible cannabis products. The products, representing 47 different brands, included baked goods, drinks, and candy, and were purchased in Seattle, San Francisco, or Los Angeles.

When a lab analysis of THC content differed by more than 10 percent than what the product label stated, the product was categorized as being either over- or under-labeled. Seventeen products (23 percent) were under-labeled, meaning they had more THC than the label advertised. Forty-five products (60 percent) were over-labeled. Only 13 products were found to be accurately labeled.

The researchers also tested each product for cannabidiol (CBD) another compound found in marijuana with possible medical applications. Forty-four products had detectable levels of CBS, however only 13 advertised that they contained the compound.

The authors conclude: "This study illustrates the variability in label accuracy for edible cannabis products within 2 of the largest medical cannabis markets in the United States.

Some experts suggest that 10 percent variability is too small. THC has been found to have a much larger margin of exposure (defined as the ratio between toxicological threshold and estimated human intake) than other substances such as alcohol, nicotine, cocaine, and heroin.

However, some mislabeling was extreme for example, one product that advertised 108 milligrams of THC actually contained only three milligrams.

This study further compounds some of the issues we brought to light last week when discussing
medical marijuana. The current piecewise approval of this drug for medicinal use is leaving the
drug unregulated and leaving the consumer lost in the dust. With these results, no patient who
seeks the possible pain-relieving effects of marijuana can feel confident they are getting that with
any purchase.

Medical marijuana needs to be treated like every other pharmaceutical drug so we can establish
its efficacy and develop standard doses for these products. Regulation is needed so we can
ensure that every product has a safe and effective amount of THC and/or CBD.

When we ran our story last week, George Lundberg, former editor of JAMA and current editor of
Medscape, wrote in to us and said the other methods of pain control are awful....if these uses hold
up as valid, they alone are ample reason for medical marihuana's availability. We agree -- if there
are benefits to be had for patients, we need to find a way to get them these drugs, but there should
be standards in place to make sure these patients aren't being misled by incorrect labels.