

**Title:** Cannabis and Pain Management Advice for Pregnant Women – Exploratory Study

Note: This project has a substantial data collection component, and could accept 3 students.

**Principal Investigator:** Stacey Gardner-Buckshaw, Ph.D., MPA, Associate Professor and Director of Community Engagement, Department of Family and Community Medicine, NEOMED and Sara Dugan, Pharm.D., BCPP, BCPS, Associate Professor, Psychiatry, Professor, Pharmacy Practice

**Location:** NEOMED College of Medicine Department of Family and Community Medicine, NEOMED College of Pharmacy, and University Hospital Rainbow Babies & Children's Ahuja Center for Women & Children Midtown.

**Abstract and Significance:** Cannabis is the most widely used illicit substance among pregnant individuals, with reported use ranging from 3.9% to 16% in the U.S. and even higher among young adults or those using cannabis to alleviate nausea. Further, recent negative political and media attention towards Acetaminophen may motivate pregnant individuals to use cannabis as an alternative to treat pain. And as recreational cannabis legalization is growing across states, perceived risk of harm during pregnancy is declining among patients. Since THC and CBD cross the placenta—and possibly accumulate in fetal tissues—the American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists (ACOG), CDC, and American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) strongly advise against cannabis use during pregnancy and lactation to protect the fetus and infant from harm and death. Yet, per patient report, dispensaries claim cannabis is safe for use during pregnancy, post-partum, and when lactating.

**Goals and Objectives:** The long-term goal of this project is to inform policymakers, and draft legislation, requiring cannabis dispensaries to follow protocols to reduce risk of harm to pregnant and post-partum women, and their unborn and infant children. The short-term objectives to be achieved this summer are to (1) identify and categorize the information medical and non-medical cannabis dispensaries are providing pregnant and post-partum/lactating patients, and (2) to assess and describe any safeguards already in place. To help accomplish this, the summer research fellow(s) will conduct a survey research study and policy analysis. The students will use existing data to inform study design, engaging stakeholders from the University Hospitals Rainbow Babies & Children's Ahuja Center for Women & Children Midtown. Then, the team will compile and report the information to stakeholders and policymakers responsible for the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) prevention and treatment expansion. The fellow(s) will be required to present the research project at NEOMED Scholarship Day and at an external professional meeting.

**Significance of Anticipated Findings:** Results of this study may inform best practices in SUD screening, intervention, and recovery, as well as public policy and protocol for distributing cannabis to pregnant, post-partum, and lactating patients, and will likely inform a forthcoming grant-funded project proposal.

**Investigative Methods:** The student will help design and implement an exploratory study to identify best practices in cannabis dispensing protocols and conduct survey research to document and categorize current dispensary practices look for themes.

**Proposed Method of Data Analysis:** This project requires simple descriptive statistics, as well as understanding of the various qualitative and quantitative methods.

**Student Role:** Under direction, the student(s) will take a leadership role in all parts of the research process including but not limited to: institutional review, informed consent, protocol development, data collection and analyses, and dissemination. The student(s) will meet at least bi-weekly with collaborating NEOMED faculty as needed.

**Mentoring Plan:**

1. Student meets with either Dr. Gardner-Buckshaw or Dr. Dugan and/or community preceptor bi-weekly.
2. Educational topics we will cover, in the context of the project:
  - A. Establishing a research question
  - B. Conducting a gap analysis/literature review
  - C. Writing a grant proposal
  - D. Protection of human subjects
  - E. Data collection/management
  - F. Posters and presentations
3. The student will work with advisors to submit a regional or national presentation of their work.

**Resources Available:** The student(s) will receive space in the DFCM, with access to computers and a telephone (as required) for research-related activities. The student will also receive research and statistical support as needed. If we receive a qualifying grant, it may be used for student travel to meetings/interviews/presentations, or for poster printing for dissemination. Student grants are available from AAFP, FMEC, and OAFP among other organizations.