

Alternative Pain Medication and Cannabis

We are all now aware of a worsening opioid crisis in America. Typically, the only choice for pain management is a combination of medications including opioids, muscle relaxants, anti-inflammatories and a series of other drugs for everything ranging from constipation to depression. Unfortunately, many of these medications do not work well when taken together. In addition, prolonged use can cause patients to develop a tolerance to certain medications which reduces their effectiveness. Injured workers need access to pain management alternatives that do not involve the risk of long-term opioid use.

Increasingly both the legislature and the public at large are recognizing the need for alternative medicine, and the most wildly discussed option is cannabis. Both Pennsylvania and New Jersey have medical marijuana programs. Patients can qualify for medical care which enables them to purchase medical grade marijuana in a variety of forms. Cannabis therapy goes far beyond the stereotypical concept of smoking a "joint". It can be utilized in a variety of edibles, vape oil, ointments, pill form, and in New Jersey the actual flowers. In addition, cannabis can come in "CBD-only" form, eliminating the substance THC thereby avoiding some of the side effects traditionally associated with "getting high". For instance, CBD oil is the preferred method of cannabis for use in infants and children suffering from seizure disorders. A variety of cannabinoids exist that treat a range of problems from chronic pain to irritable bowel, anxiety and sleep deprivation. Medical professionals are increasingly available in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey to help counsel injured workers on the appropriate use of cannabis as an alternative treatment.

There are legal complications associated with the use of cannabis. First, many insurance companies will not reimburse the cost of the treatment. This refusal might be based more on ethical and moral concerns that actual cost, since it would be hard to make the case that a naturally growing plant will be more expensive than engineered synthetic pharmaceuticals. There appears to be an increasing acceptance that cannabis expenses in lieu of opioid use is a reasonable alternative and more cost effective without the risk. Furthermore, injured workers returning to employment while using cannabis may violate company policy. It is important before engaging in a treatment program to discuss with your counsel the potential legal ramifications of using such treatment. The prior stigma associated with cannabis use is rapidly changing particularly in light of the opioid epidemic. If you are currently undergoing pain management, do not hesitate to consult your treating physician about your medical options.