



Top cannabis researchers meet at King's

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2 May 2007. Leading Institute of Psychiatry researchers looking into the effects of cannabis and mental health, have discussed their latest findings at a major press briefing to UK journalists, and will present their work to visiting international academics at a major conference being held at King's (1 and 2 May).

This second International Cannabis and Mental Health Conference, is taking place in the Franklin-Wilkins Building, Waterloo Campus. Key speakers include Robin Murray, Head of the Division of Psychological Medicine and Professor of Psychiatry, and Philip McGuire, Professor of Psychiatry and Cognitive Neuroscience from the Institute of Psychiatry, and high profile visiting academics including Professor Markus Leweke from the University of Cologne.

One key area of research being presented at the conference reports on an Institute of Psychiatry project involving healthy volunteers given the active ingredient tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) found in cannabis. This is the active ingredient that produces a high. The levels of THC are thought to have doubled in street cannabis in recent years – at the expense of other ingredients which may have a beneficial effect.

A separate study also being discussed at conference looked at one of the more beneficial ingredients of cannabis known as cannabidiol (CBD) which can potentially dampen down psychotic symptoms, and could form the basis of new treatments.

A press briefing earlier this week about this study led to major international and national media coverage.

Commenting on this chemical, Professor Robin Murray, Professor of Psychiatry at the Institute says 'Maybe the cannabidiol ameliorates some of the effects of the THC and maybe it actually might be good for you if you are psychotic.'

There is anecdotal evidence that the number of patients in the UK with psychotic symptoms linked to cannabis use is increasing. Professor Murray went on to say that this could be linked to the increased THC content of herbal cannabis sold on the street.

Increasingly potent

It is estimated that as many as 500,000 people in the UK may have a cannabis dependency and increasing numbers of people are seeking help for cannabis problems at specialist clinics. There is concern amongst experts that street cannabis is becoming increasingly potent.

Following the highly successful 1st International Conference, Cannabis and Mental Health (December 2004), this conference is addressing the latest cannabis research carried out in a wide range of topics including the new findings on the neurobiology of cannabis, its effects on mental health, its interaction with severe mental illness and clinical interventions to reduce cannabis consumption.

Conference attendees include clinicians in mental health, the drug and alcohol fields, as well as researchers, pharmacists and voluntary organisations.

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