

## Pot found to ease HIV-associated pain

by Bend\_Weekly\_News\_Sources

Smoking marijuana reduced intense foot pain associated with HIV infection by 34 percent in a randomized trial, researchers at the University of California-San Francisco report.

The marijuana pain reduction was found to be twice as much as that of a comparison group, who smoked marijuana with the active ingredient removed. The clinical trial was the first in many years in the United States, and helps fill in a major gap in knowledge resulting from the paucity of such research, said the university's Igor Grant. "There has been insufficient light shed on the possible therapeutic value of cannabis, or marijuana," said Grant, a psychiatrist who directs the university's Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research. The study was the first comparison of several clinical trials of cannabis being conducted under the center's auspices, and the latest volley in a decades-long debate over marijuana's merits or dangers. One recent paper proposed that the drug can be either healthy or bad, depending on the dose. The study, published in the February 13 issue of the research journal *Neurology*, looked at 50 people with HIV-associated sensory neuropathy, a painful and often debilitating condition. Occurring usually in the feet and characterized at times by tingling, numbness, pins-and-needles sensations, burning, and sharp intense pain, severe cases can make walking or standing difficult. "There is a measurable beneficial fit to smoking cannabis for these patients," said Donald I. Abrams, the lead author. Patients smoked the study cigarettes three times a day for five days under supervision. The marijuana response "was comparable to strong pain relievers we have studied, such as morphine," said co-author Karin L. Petersen.

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