

Change in quality of life and pain outcomes for cancer patients accessing prescribed medical cannabis: the QUEST Initiative 3-month results.

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Introduction

Since Australia legalised medicinal cannabis in 2016, more than 10,600 cancer patients have received prescriptions for symptom management.¹

Clinical practice guidelines favour prescribing cannabis due to patients' placing high value on small improvements, and willingness to accept small-modest risks of adverse effects.² However, reporting of patient-reported outcomes in clinical practice is limited.

We aimed to assess changes in pain and overall quality of life (QoL) for cancer patients prescribed medicinal cannabis.

Methods

This sub-study includes participants with any cancer diagnosis recruited to QUEST; a prospective observational study of adult patients prescribed medicinal cannabis oil between Nov 2020 -Dec 2021, by 117 clinicians across Australia.

QoL and pain were assessed using EQ-5D-5L³, and QLQ-C30⁴ pain subscale respectively, at baseline, titration, then monthly for 3 months.

Change over time was analysed using linear mixed models adjusted for age, sex, pain duration, and prior use of cannabis.

Results

Of 145 patients diagnosed with cancer invited to the study, 98 provided consent and completed both baseline and at least one follow-up questionnaire.

Participants mean age was 61.3years (SD:13.1), 58.2% female, and 10.2% in palliative care. Improvements were observed from baseline to follow-up in QoL (MD=0.11, SD=0.27; $t_{(363)}=3.87$, $p<0.001$; Figure 1) and pain scores (MD=11.53, SD=25.78; $t_{(366)}=4.43$, $p<0.001$; Figure 2). Following questionnaire interpretation guidelines, these changes indicated clinically meaningful improvement.

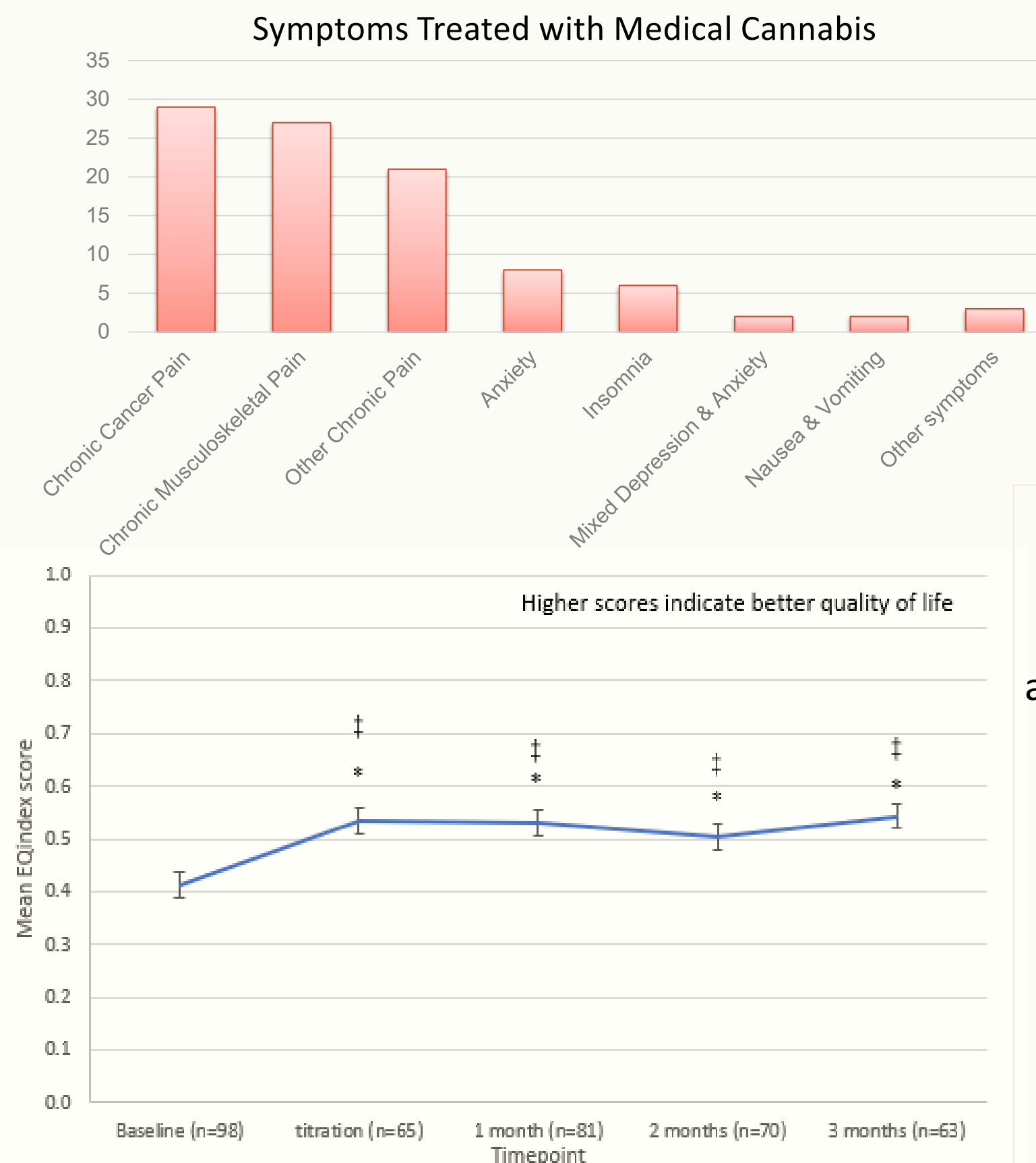


Figure 1. Change over time in mean EQ-5D-5L utility index scores for 98 participants prescribed medicinal cannabis in the QUEST Initiative cancer sub-study (with SE bars; *indicates significant change from baseline, $p<0.05$; ‡ indicates clinically meaningful change from baseline ≥ 0.07 points).

Clinically meaningful improvements in pain and QoL were observed in cancer patients prescribed medical cannabis following 2-week titration and maintained over 3 months.

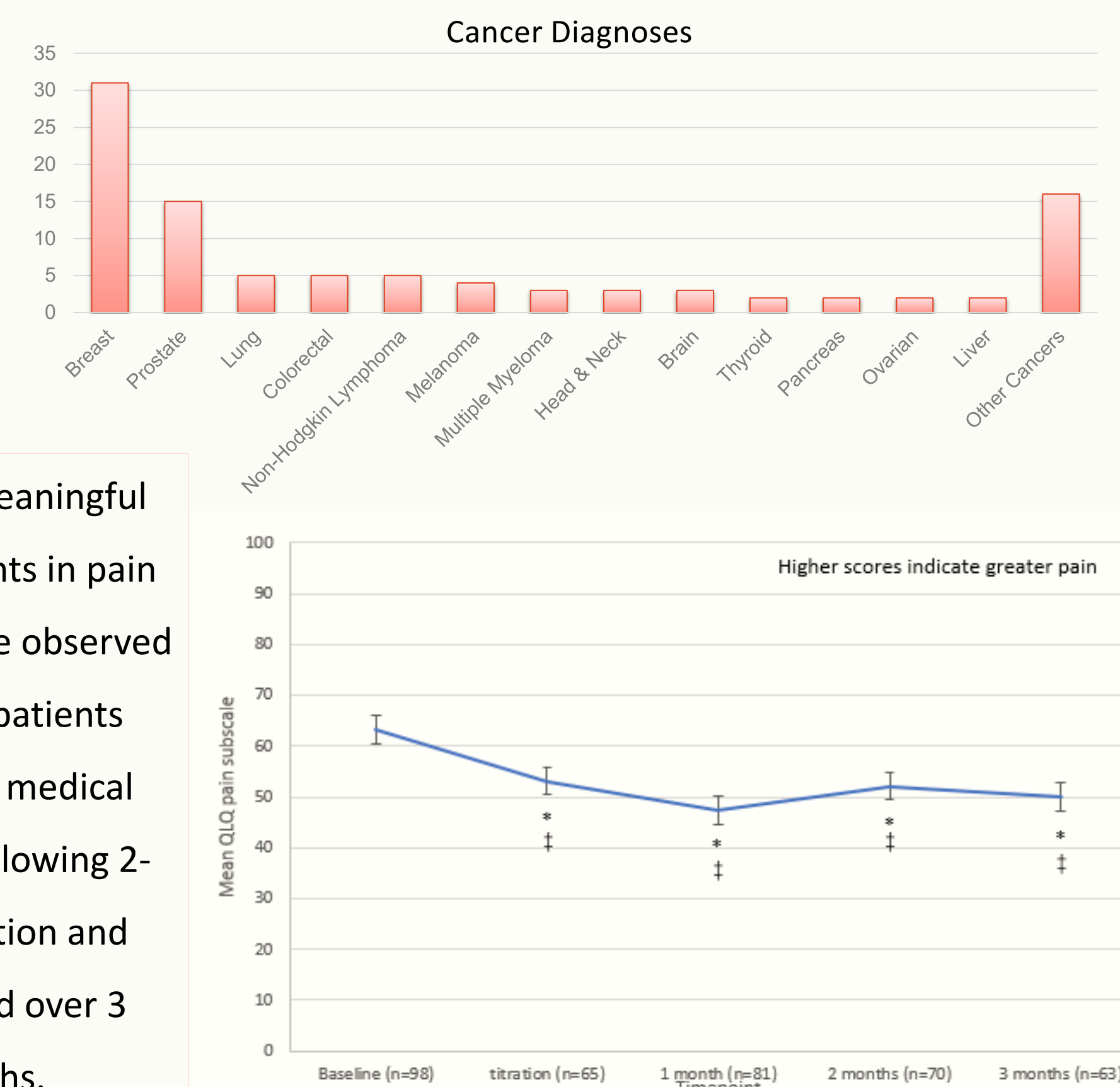


Figure 2. Change over time in mean QLQ-C30 pain subscale scores for 98 participants with cancer prescribed medicinal cannabis in the QUEST Initiative study (with SE bars; *indicates significant change from baseline $p<0.05$; ‡ indicates clinically meaningful change from baseline ≥ 10 points).

Conclusions

Findings suggest that prescribing medicinal cannabis in clinical practice may:

- alleviate cancer patients' symptoms and improve overall QoL,
- avoid potential risks of cannabis abuse by self-medicating,
- allow clinicians to monitor possible adverse events.

Interpretation of results is limited by a lack of control group. The QUEST Initiative follows patients for 12-months to determine whether 3-month improvements are maintained long-term.

References

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Further information

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