

Treating severe autism with a controversial marijuana compound

UC San Diego will try to alleviate severe autism in children by giving them a non-psychoactive chemical found in marijuana, a project funded by the biggest private donation ever made in the U.S. for such research.

The \$4.7 million study involves the controversial compound cannabidiol, or CBD, which is widely marketed nationwide as something of a miracle drug, capable of treating everything from cancer to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Regulators believe CBD does show therapeutic promise. But they also say the miracle drug claims are wrong or based on anecdotes rather than scientific evidence.

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UC San Diego's Center for Medicinal Cannabis Research (CMCR) will conduct a clinical trial involving 30 autistic children with severe symptoms. The children, who will be recruited from throughout the region, will be given a liquid form of CBD that will be provided by a federally approved laboratory in Arizona. During the study, which begins next year, the children will also undergo behavioral testing, MRI scans and electroencephalograms. The patients will range in age from 8 to 12.

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The university says the overall project, led by Dr. Igor Grant, "will determine if CBD is safe and tolerable and whether it alleviates adverse symptoms of ASD; determine whether and how CBD alters brain activity, neurotransmitters and/or brain network connectivity; and determine whether biomarkers or neuroinflammation are altered by CBD."

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