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CANNABIS DRUGS ‘MAY CONTROL SYMPTOMS OF GUT DISEASE’

The active ingredient of cannabis may be an effective treatment for the chronic gut conditions Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis, according to research presented at the British Society of Gastroenterology’s Annual Scientific Meeting today.

The research found that cannabis-like (cannabinoid) drugs help the surface cells of the bowel survive in laboratory experiments.

The study looked at the effect of the drugs on normal human colon cells and found that blocking a receptor for cannabinoids meant the cells were less likely to grow.

Previous research by the same team has found that cannabinoids promote the closure of a gap in cells cultured in the laboratory. “That means that they might well promote wound healing in patients with Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis”, said Dr Karen Wright, Lecturer in Molecular Pharmacology at the University of Bath.

“We don’t know how it does this, but it is probably promoting the closure of the “wound” we made to the cell culture, and it means it could help heal the lining of the intestines in these diseases.”

Dr Wright is in the planning stages of an early clinical trial to see whether THC, the active ingredient in cannabis, can help control Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis. “These are not cures for the disease, but they may help to limit the symptoms, which can be disabling.”

“There are a number of therapeutic targets and we are planning a pilot study looking at the effects of THC capsules in patients with Crohn’s disease and ulcerative colitis.”

The researchers believe that cannabinoid receptors in the gut play a regulatory role in helping the normal healthy cells that line the gut to grow and survive.

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Cannabinoids promote survival of normal human colonic epithelial cells
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Note to Editor's:

The British Society of Gastroenterology Annual Scientific Meeting is taking place from 20th-23rd March, 2006 at the ICC, Birmingham