

Pot may increase risk for heart attacks

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

Over a five-year period, a government-mandated tracking system in France showed that physicians in that country treated 1,979 patients for serious health problems associated with the use of marijuana, and nearly 2 percent of those encounters were with patients suffering from cardiovascular problems, including heart attack, cardiac arrhythmia and stroke, and circulation problems in the arms and legs. In roughly a quarter of those cases, the study found, the patient died.

In the United States, when young and otherwise healthy patients show up in emergency departments with symptoms of heart attack, stroke, cardiomyopathy and cardiac arrhythmia, physicians have frequently noted in case reports that these unusual patients are regular marijuana users.

Such reporting is hardly the basis for declaring marijuana use an outright cause of cardiovascular disease. But last month, cardiologists writing in the Journal of the American Heart Association warned that “clinical evidence ... suggests the potential for serious cardiovascular risks associated with marijuana use.” And with a growing movement to decriminalize marijuana use, they called for data-collection efforts capable of detecting and measuring marijuana’s cardiovascular impact among American users of cannabis sativa.

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