Reviewer's report

Title: Time-course of cannabis withdrawal symptoms in poly-substance abusers

Version: 2 Date: 30 January 2013

Reviewer: David Penetar

Reviewer's report:

The authors are to be commended for undertaking an assessment of withdrawal symptoms in this polydrug abusing sample. The paper reports useful and significant findings for understanding the nature and time course of cannabis withdrawal in a population not previous studied.

The questions posed by the authors are well defined, and the methods are appropriate and understandable. The data are sound and analyzed with appropriate statistical techniques. The presentation of the results however could use some improvement.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

The figures need to have the axes labeled and the legends need to provide additional information so that the figures can ‘stand alone’ for the reader to comprehend easily.

The individual graphs in Figure 2 would seem to benefit from headings/titles within the graph.

Table 3 is missing footnote #2 for ‘Days since last cannabis use squared’. There is no footnote #1.

Figure 3 and Table 5 are not discussed in the paper. Please present the information in the Results or delete the figure and table.

Minor Essential Revisions:

The presentation of the average scores and their standard deviations could be improved in Tables. It is difficult to quickly see the important values. Perhaps if in the format of 0.9±0.94 would be more readable. An additional column heading of 1st Week, 2nd Week, and 4th week would be useful.

Table 1 is first presented in the Methods as a way to list the items assessed, but the data are not further addressed in the Results. Are there any significant time effects (i.e., increases or decreases) for the items? If not, how do these results fit with Figure 1 that shows significant changes over the 30 days of assessment? Additional explanation is necessary.

The font in Table 3 is inconsistent with the rest of the manuscript.
Doesn’t the ASI provide information about duration of time a drug has been used? Although not all participants completed the ASI, this information may still be useful to better quantify the sample studied. Another factor in understanding severity of cannabis withdrawal symptoms is to know if the person has tried to quit previously and was not successful. In our experience, those that tried to quit previously have more severe withdrawal symptoms.

Discretionary Revisions:

There seem to be some inconsistencies in citing the references in the text. Sometimes multiple authors are listed at first citing; other times et al. is used.

Section 1.1.1. Third line. Remove period after ‘withdrawal’.

Section 1.1.2. Last sentence: “…the inclusion of these symptoms are discussed”

Section 1.1.2. Decreased appetite or weight loss. 1st sentence is missing ‘weight’.

Section 1.1.3 1st sentence, 3rd paragraph: “…which appears to be as common as the other DSM-V symptoms”

Section 1.1.3 Last sentence, 1st paragraph: “..in the heading of the questionnaire, over to asking on the same form…”

Section 1.4 Discussion: The discussion of THC concentration, and time course and severity of withdrawal symptoms could be improved by referencing and comparing information in Kouri & Pope, 2000.

Section 1.4.1 Not sure what is meant by ‘… obtain a consecutive sample of patients’

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.