Reviewer's report

Title: Cannabis treatment outcomes among legally coerced and non-coerced adults

Version: Date: 28 February 2007

Reviewer: Carl Hart

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1. Copeland and Maxwell examined the records of adults enrolled in a public-supported treatment program in Texas, USA – cannabis appeared to be the primary drug of concern – in an effort to compare treatment outcomes for individuals legally coerced into treatment with individuals not coerced into treatment. It appears that data from the Addiction Severity Index (ASI) served as the primary outcome measures, although information from DSM-IV diagnoses was inconsistently provided. The main finding was that legally-coerced individuals fared better on treatment outcome measures, i.e., they were more likely to have completed treatment and less likely to have psychosocial problems. This is an interesting line of research, but there are few areas of concerns that reduce my enthusiasm for the current paper.

MAJOR CONCERNS
2. The main concern is related to the primary finding (i.e., coerced individuals had better treatment outcomes). These individuals were under criminal justice supervision, and were thus highly motivate to complete treatment because failure to do so might have resulted into imprisonment. Because the two groups were operating under radically different contingencies (e.g., the threat of imprisonment vs no threat), the major finding seems trivial. Furthermore, this concern calls into question the conclusions stated on page 14. Another important concern is the use of the term “impairment” when describing results from the present study. The methodology employed in this study does not appear appropriate to make statements about impairments, i.e., because an individual is prescribed an antidepressant medication, does not necessarily indicate that the individual is “impaired.” Please revise this language where appropriate.

MINOR CONCERNS
Background:
3. The ethical issues associated with legally coerced treatment should be elaborated.

Methods:
4. On page 5, the sentence “BHIPS request information…is unclear.

Results:
5. It is stated that 21% of non-coerced and 10% of coerced participants were prescribed medications. While it is stated that antidepressants were the most common medications, additional details about other types of prescribed medications would be helpful.
6. In the first sentence of the fourth paragraph on page 7, it is unclear to whom the authors are referring, i.e. “These patients also received…”. Please clarify this sentence.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests