THE PHOLLOW COHORT: CHARACTERISTICS OF PRESCRIPTION CANNABIS-BASED MEDICINES (CBM) USERS IN PORTUGAL

Mariana Romão[1]; Carolina Rojais[1]; Maria Cary[1*]; Maria Alberty[2]; Rúben Pereira[1]; Zilda Mendes[1]

[1]Centre for Health Evaluation & Research/Infosaúde, National Association of Pharmacies (CEFAR-IF/ANF), Lisbon, Portugal

[2]FAI Therapeutics by Ferraz Lynce, Barcarena, Portugal

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Background

In 2018, Portugal legalized the dispensing of prescription-only cannabis-based medicines (CBM) for medicinal purposes in community pharmacies (CP). In the following year, a list of therapeutic indications for these products was approved. The first two CBPM that came to market were a THC + CBD oromucosal spray and then cannabis flowering tops. Since then, little was known about the characteristics of CBPM users in Portugal.

Objectives

This study aimed to generate evidence about the use of prescription-only cannabis-based medicines (CBM) in terms of patient profile, origin of the prescription, history of CBM use and comedication in the real-world setting in Portugal.

Methods

This was a retrospective, multicentre, descriptive study on a cohort of CBM users identified in a pool of Portuguese CP. This study was based on pseudoanonymized secondary dispense data comprised in the Phollow database (which covered about 60% of all CBM dispensed during the study period). (Fig.1)

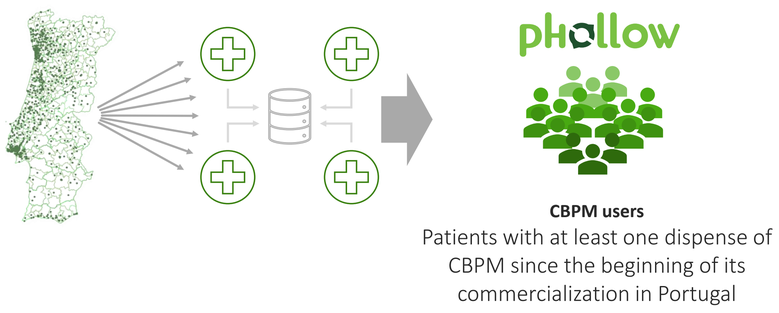


Fig. 1 – Patient selection

Dispense data was retrieved between **January 2019 and June 2023**. Data regarding patient and prescription characteristics were collected accordingly to Fig.2.

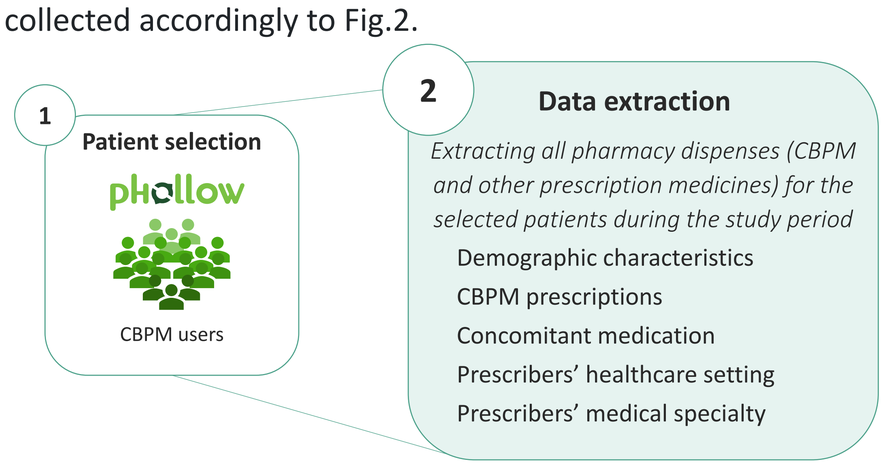


Fig. 2 – Data extraction

Analysis

- Patient characteristics were described using standard descriptive statistics, overall and per patient subgroup.
- Patient and prescriber characteristics were described referring to the **first CBM prescription for each user.**
- CBM patient history: according to the history of dispenses, the **time using CBM** and the **amount of CBM units purchased** were calculated.
- **Concomitant medication was analyzed for the period between the first and the last CBM dispense ±60 days, and described using the ATC classification.**

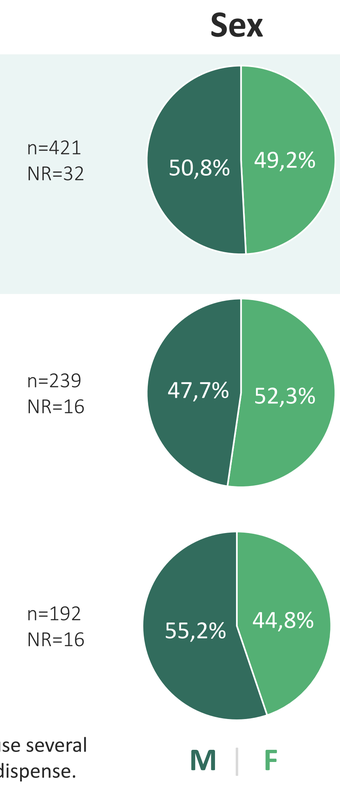
Results

Patient profile*

453 individuals
First patient, first visit: September 13th, 2019

255 individuals
THC + CBD oromucosal spray

208 individuals
Cannabis flowering tops

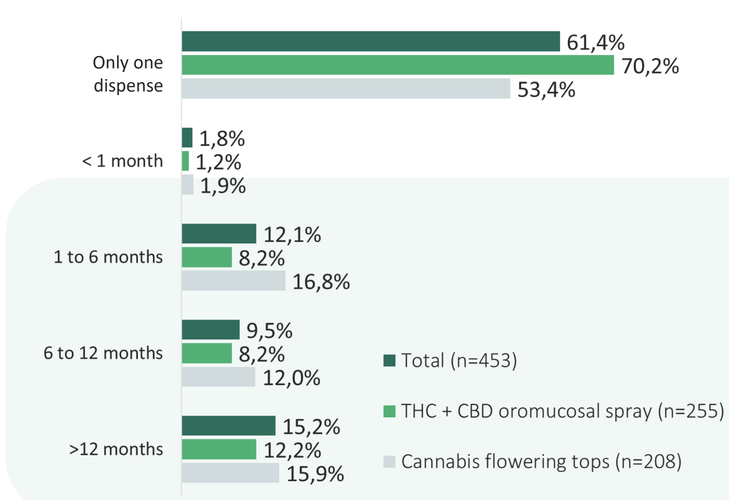


Age (Years)	
Min.	5.0
Mean (SD)	55.1 (16.2)
Median	55.0
Max.	90.0
	n = 453
Min.	5.0
Mean (SD)	58.8 (15.7)
Median	59.0
Max.	90.0
	n = 255
Min.	21.0
Mean (SD)	50.2 (15.7)
Median	48.5
Max.	90.0
	n = 208

*Patient subgroups were not independent because several individuals purchased both products in the first-dispense. Hence, no comparative analysis was performed.

CBPM patient history

Time using CBM
(time between first and last CBM dispense)



- 76.8% of long-time users (>12 months) are also frequent buyers (>3 units).

Purchase frequency
(Units purchased per time using CBM)

Total n=167 (36.9%)	2 units	3 units	>3 units
1 to 6 months (n=55)	**45.5%**	29.0%	25.5%
6 to 12 months (n=43)	18.6%	20.9%	**60.5%**
>12 months (n=69)	8.7%	14.5%	**76.8%**

Therapeutic Profile

Considering all CBM users in cohort (n=453) the Top 3 most common **concomitant therapies**, classified by ATC2, are **N02 Analgesics** (48.1%), **N06 Psychoanaleptics** (40.6%), and **N05 Psycholeptics** (35.3%).

Concomitant therapy
(TOP 3 most frequent INN International Nonproprietary Names)

n=453		n=255		n=208	
Paracetamol	17.7%	Cholecalciferol	18.4%	Fentanyl	18.8%
Gabapentin	14.3%	Paracetamol	16.9%	Paracetamol	18.3%
Cholecalciferol	13.0%	Baclofen	16.5%	Gabapentin	13.5%

Conclusions

Data from the Phollow database allowed categorization of patients based on their duration of CBM use and purchase frequency. Since market entry, few patients initiated treatment with CBM in Portugal, most being one-time users. The prescribers' medical specialties and concomitant medications suggest that the real-world therapeutic indications of CBM are related to pain and/or neurological conditions. More research is needed to understand these profiles.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge all pharmacies who voluntarily share sell-out data with ANF.

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*Corresponding author: maria.cary@anf.pt