

Special Issue

Cannabinoids

Message from the Guest Editors

Despite a 5000-year history of medicinal cannabis use, insights into the modern pharmacology of cannabis and cannabinoids only occurred over a more recent 50 year span, which was triggered when Gaoni and Mechoulam (1964) first identified delta9-tetrahydrocannabinol, the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis. This was closely followed by the cloning of the cannabinoid type 1 receptor in the late 1980s and, shortly after, the cannabinoid type 2 receptor, both of which are targets for THC and cannabinoids. Identification of endogenous ligands (i.e., anandamide and 2-arachidonyl glycerol) that activate cannabinoid receptors laid the framework for an endogenous cannabinoid signaling system, which, together with receptors and enzymes for biosynthesis and degradation of endocannabinoids, was coined the “endocannabinoid system”—similar to other endogenous systems (e.g., the endorphin system). Currently, many synthetic agonists and antagonists, as well as naturally occurring “phytocannabinoids” that target the endocannabinoid system, have been investigated and found to exhibit significant potential as medicines in preclinical and clinical studies.

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