

Debunking the Myth of 'medical marijuana'



Dalgarno Research Team

A synoptic overview of the current claims of the 'benefits' of self-regulating/self-medicating cannabis use, and some of the reasons why legalisation is not only unnecessary, but dangerous.

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The Myth of 'Medical' Marijuana

The Dalgarno Institute takes a very strong position against the legalisation of untested, non-standardised preparations of marijuana for medical purposes. The reasons are simple: medical authorities oppose this change; there are better regulated and approved alternatives available; the harms far outweigh any benefits; the proclaimed aim of advocates for legalisation is to use this as a pathway to the legalisation of recreational marijuana and other dangerous drugs.

Who wants it?

It is not Australia's medical establishment that is asking for crude cannabis to be used here as medicine. A recent paper published in the British Medical Journal shows that cannabis could be a major contributor to UK deaths and stating that cannabis smoking can be described as a major health hazard whether used as medication or recreationally.

Medical authorities claim that medical illnesses and premature death and the mental health burden means that the potential effects of cannabis cannot be ignored.

The push for smoked marijuana is orchestrated by drug legalisation lobbyists who publicly support NSW media-showcase Dan Haslan's use of smoked cannabis for chemotherapy-induced nausea. The harms of smoking as a delivery system are self-evident – no medicine is ever smoked.

According to the 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, a survey of more than 24,000 Australians, 92% of Australians do not approve the recreational use of cannabis, which is precisely what Australia21's lobbyists are seeking to legalise. While 69% of Australians support 'medical marijuana' in the same study, the Dalgarno Institute believes very few of these Australians would be able to specify the handful of medical indications attributed to cannabis or that better alternatives are available.

Tested and Approved Alternatives are Available

Almost everyone who has symptoms alleviated by cannabis can get the active substance, THC, in pill form or as an oral spray. They are called Marinol and Sativex, and both are prescribed in Australia. Marinol can be imported legally under TGA Special Access. Alternatively, the whole-leaf extract of cannabis, called Sativex, was approved by the Australian TGA in 2012 for MS spasticity. Both medications are pharmaceutically standardised in terms of dosage, strength and purity, which crude cannabis products are not.

Cannabinoids are not a first-line drug for any medical condition. Other legally available drugs are better for each of the few conditions which cannabinoids have been found to alleviate.

More Harm than Good

Like tobacco, which does have a handful of possible medical uses, the benefits of marijuana are very few, very modest and associated with other harms that often outweigh benefits.

Cannabis lobbyists delight in portraying cannabis as a benign drug. They cite a history of no marijuana overdoses in contrast to other drugs like heroin and they make the comparison with tobacco. However recent evidence explodes this myth. Cannabis has been directly linked to recent deaths and contributes to over 30,000 premature deaths in England each year with many more others harms established in literally thousands of scientific studies. The British Lung Foundation says smoking three joints a day can cause the same damage to the airways as a pack of 20 cigarettes.

Smoked cannabis contains 1500 toxic chemicals. It is a gateway to other dangerous drugs. Cannabis users are 50% more likely to develop an alcohol use disorder. The chance cannabis users of developing psychosis is 2.6 times greater. They are 4 times more likely to develop depression. There is a 3-fold higher risk of ideating suicide. Withdrawal is associated with anxiety, depression, sleep and appetite disturbances, irritability, restlessness, violence and aggression. Cannabis depresses the immune system.

It causes 'a-motivational syndrome', affects verbal learning, organisational skills, coordination, memory (sometimes permanent) and attention. A driver is 16 times more likely to hit obstacles. Cannabis causes miscarriage, infertility and negatively affects the weight and size of newborns as well as motor functions through to adulthood. It causes bronchitis, lung and breast cancer, stroke and heart attack, with the chances of myocardial infarction 5 times higher after a joint. For any person helped by medical marijuana, there'll be 100 families negatively impacted by cannabis' greater availability.

The Myth Exploded

So why is it positioned as a wonder drug? Richard Cowan, Director of NORML, said in 1993, "The consensus here is that medical marijuana is our strongest suit. It is our point of leverage which will move us toward the legalization of marijuana for personal use."

That's the medical marijuana myth exploded.

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