

Medical Marijuana – Multiplying the Misery of Abuse

By Bruce D. Grant

Director, Florida Office of Drug Control

There is a growing movement to make the use of cannabis for medical purposes legal in Florida. It seems that every few years vocal marijuana interest groups seek a way to normalize their drug of choice to the rest of us. Maybe they forget the terrible human toll exacted by drug abuse. We have to look no further than our own friends and families, addiction treatment centers, and local hospitals to see the tragic consequences these substances visit upon human beings. The misery would only be compounded should medical marijuana be allowed.

Smoked marijuana is not medicine. Pot smoke contains more carcinogens than cigarette smoke and is simply not healthy for you. In short, inhaling toxic chemicals and carcinogens from the burning of a crude weed is not recommended by any reputable medical authority. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration routinely tests new drugs according to a rigorous protocol to prove their safety before they are allowed to be sold to the public as medicine. Marijuana has passed no such test.

Is there potential use for some form of cannabis in medicine? Sure. The American Medical Association recently recognized limited therapeutic benefits of marijuana -- specifically pain reduction, and appetite improvement -- in certain patients and has called for further research to look into the development of cannabinoid-based medicines and alternate delivery systems.

If this research shows promise, scientists will then be able to isolate the therapeutic chemicals, have them tested and approved by the FDA, and finally packaged in a synthetic form as medicine much like was done with Marinol some years ago.

These are possibilities for the future, but right now neither the AMA nor any competent medical authority in this country has yet endorsed marijuana as medicine.

Considering our national obsession with the health consequences of high cholesterol, trans fats, obesity, and second-hand tobacco smoke, why would we seek to now legitimize and encourage the use of a carcinogenic substance?

Let's look at the California experiment that began in 1996. People in that state have been using medical marijuana as a convenient cover for the illegal recreational use of the drug. Initially prescribed to alleviate nausea and loss of appetite associated with treatments for cancer and HIV, medical cannabis is now widely prescribed for ailments such as headaches, back pains, insomnia and even in-grown toenails.

In one clinic in San Diego in 2006, the DEA reported that only 2% of the patients received their prescriptions for serious conditions like AIDS and cancer, while the other 98% received marijuana to treat back spasms, headaches, anxiety and other such maladies. Is this the kind of “medicine” we want in Florida?

The case for medical marijuana is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The true agenda behind the rhetoric is full legalization. Smoking marijuana as a medical treatment empowers marijuana interest groups to achieve their ultimate goal of marketing this intoxicating substance to the entire population – sick or not.

Legalization would most certainly lead to abuse by an even greater number of youth and adults than seen today. Ask any addict undergoing treatment whether or not marijuana should be legalized and you will get a resounding “NO”.

Why? Because between alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs we already have enough problems with substance abuse. Drug abuse inflicts staggering monetary costs reflected in crime, incarceration, property damage, and adverse health outcomes. Even worse is the terrible cost in lost human lives.

Smoked marijuana is not safe, not healthy and not medicine. It is an illegal drug with potential for abuse. Allowing medical marijuana would embolden those who would use the plight of the sick as a clever subterfuge for drug legalization with tragic ramifications for our citizens. We support medical progress and relieving pain in the sick and dying, but allowing medical marijuana would cost us all more than we can pay.