

medical marijuana: point/counterpoint

Dear Rick,

June 14, 1994

Thank you for the materials on MAPS and related matters. While we do not agree on many issues, I do review and read material expressing various viewpoints.

I have enclosed some material related to marijuana and cancer that causes particular concern. This material resembles the early information on tobacco cigarettes and lung cancer. Of course, the tobacco industry attempted to discredit the early studies and to hold research to impossible standards. I hope the marijuana lobby will not be as successful as the tobacco lobby was in dodging the data and studies. Did you know that the Indian Hemp Report also lauded the medicinal value of tobacco smoke?

On the medical marijuana issue, I think the verdict is pretty much in among true medical scientists, researchers, and practitioners. I generally consider the credibility and direct experience of the source of such research and when I see a reliance on non-clinical research, or researchers, it throws up a red flag in my mind. The primary movers behind the "pot as medicine" propaganda, are the leaders and longtime affiliates of pro-drug liberalization organizations and pot smoker lobbies, such as NORML.

I am not aware if any of them, even those with medical degrees, have actually performed and published original medical or clinical research in the past twenty years. It seems as though they primarily serve as the tobacco industry's "experts" do, to downplay and discredit the work of others. In an ironic twist to normal consumer protection standards, they assume that all mind altering toxic chemicals are safe for human consumption and disregard all studies to the contrary. They give the benefit of the doubt to the drug seller, and let the consumer suffer the consequences. The pharmaceutical companies will make a killing (pun intended) if this becomes the new standard for all drugs.

Rick, while we are diametrically opposed on most issues, I do sense that you are a sincere and sensitive individual. You may find that not all of those around you are as sincere and that your views were wrong and unintentionally damaging, especially to children. Only by remaining open to the evidence will you ever know for sure.

Sincerely,
Robert E. Peterson
Director - Office of Drug Control Policy
State of Michigan

Dear Robert,

July 11, 1994

Your letter of June 14 concerning the medical use of marijuana stressed the lack of clinical research supporting marijuana's safety and efficacy for any clinical indication. Clearly, I place more stock than you in the value of anecdotal evidence (which was sufficient "to identify the therapeutic potential of chloral hydrate, the barbiturates, ether, nitrous oxide, chloroform, curare, aspirin, quinine, insulin, thyroid, epinephrine, local anesthetics, belladonna, antacids, sulfonamides and penicillin, to give a partial list" - Dr. Louis Lasagna, Director, Center for the Study of Drug Development, Tufts University- Reprint Series #8695). Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence can be misleading. Therefore, I agree with you that clinical research is essential to prove (or reject) marijuana's medical value.

You indicated in your letter that you thought I was sincere and sensitive. I appreciate those kind remarks, along with the time you spent to write the letter and your implicit hope that I would listen to your ideas.

I'm writing now to challenge us both to live up to your admonition to "remain open to the evidence." For the last two years, Dr. Donald Abrams of UC San Francisco and I have been working to secure all the necessary permissions required to conduct a controlled clinical trial comparing smoked marijuana to the oral THC capsule in the treatment of the HIV-related Wasting Syndrome. The protocol has finally been approved by the FDA, the UC San Francisco Institutional Review Board, the Scientific Advisory Committee of the San

Francisco Community Consortium, and the California Research Advisory Panel.

Unfortunately, Dr. Donald Abrams' application for a DEA Schedule I license has been pending for more than three months. I believe that you are sincere in stating that this issue should turn on the scientific merits of clinical trials. I'm writing now to ask you to consider contacting Mr. Gene Haislip, DEA Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Diversion Control (202-307-7165) to express your support for Dr. Donald Abrams' Schedule I license. Then, we can both await the results of his pilot study to see what light it sheds. Without permission to conduct research, the claim that there is no scientific support for the medical use of marijuana rings hollow. I'm sure you see this, and hope you choose to support Dr. Abrams' research.

Respectfully yours,
Rick Doblin
MAPS President

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