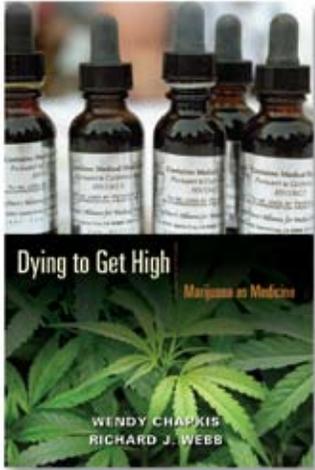


## Dying to Get High: Marijuana as Medicine

Review by David Jay Brown, M.A.



### Dying to Get High: Marijuana as Medicine

By Wendy Chapkis & Richard J. Webb  
New York University Press, 2008.  
Softbound, photographs,  
257 pages, \$22.

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**N**OTED University of Southern Maine sociologist Wendy Chapkis, Ph.D., and Richard J. Webb, a lecturer in Communications Studies at San Jose University, have written an extraordinarily well-researched volume about the sociological history of America’s most highly praised and politically successful medical marijuana organization—the Wo/Men’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM) in Santa Cruz, California. WAMM is a collective of seriously ill patients and their caregivers who work together to grow their own physician-recommended cannabis, and make their own cannabis products, in full cooperation with the local and state governments, and with strong support from their local community. It’s the only organization of its kind in the world.

The authors of *Dying to Get High* meticulously trace and carefully explain the often perplexing history of America’s pharmaceutical industry, federal marijuana prohibition, the suppression of medical marijuana research, and the unique social and cultural developments in the city Santa Cruz that allowed for this groundbreaking collective to form, to gain such strong community support, and to flourish—despite brutal attempts by the Federal Government to crush it. *Dying to Get High* unfolds like a gripping detective novel, and it’s difficult to put the book down, as it holds such strong potential to both anger and inspire. It’s especially hard to read about WAMM’s cruel encounter with the Federal Government, and not be extremely outraged at how the DEA treated frail, weak, and crippled WAMM members like violent criminals, terrorizing seriously ill patients who were simply trying to take care of themselves and alleviate their own suffering. At the same time, I don’t think that anyone can read about how the patients bravely fought back, and not be deeply touched and inspired.

Compelling interviews with WAMM members (patients and caregivers), WAMM cofounders Valerie and Mike Corral, Santa Cruz public officials, law enforce-

ment officers, physicians, public policy reformers, and other experts, are woven into the narrative. MAPS president Rick Doblin, Ph.D. is quoted a number of times in the book about medical marijuana research, and NIDA’s federal blockade of Professor Lyle Craker’s marijuana cultivation project is summarized. Profusely illustrated with beautiful, emotionally-charged photographs of the medical marijuana patients and the WAMM garden, this thoughtfully-designed volume will warm your heart, bring tears to your eyes, and hopefully, motivate you into political action. Reading about the patients’ courageous struggles is truly inspiring, and slowly advancing political gains give us great reason for hope, but—to this day—medical marijuana remains illegal on a federal level and WAMM continues to struggle for its survival.

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This is an extremely important and unusually valuable book from a sociological and medical perspective. Although the material in the book is presented in an objective manner, Chapkis and Webb are not exactly without their bias. It’s pretty clear that the authors think that sick and physically challenged people should have the right to choose and grow their own medicine—and it’s pretty difficult to argue with their well-reasoned, thoroughly researched presentation. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the medical potential of cannabis, the conflict between pharmaceutical drugs and herbal supplements, drug war politics, grassroots political activism, and alternative health-care.

(To find out more about WAMM, or purchase this book see: [www.wamm.org](http://www.wamm.org). Donations can be sent to: WAMM, 309 Cedar Street, #34, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.)