

Weighing In On the Medical Marijuana Debate –

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The GCSAPP, as the local substance abuse prevention coalition, would like to offer our perspective on the medical marijuana issue presently facing our community, and the potential opening of dispensaries within our County. We have two main concerns: 1) the apparent ease of obtaining medical marijuana licenses and 2) what should we tell our youth about marijuana now that it is legally available for some individuals?

First: The apparent ease of accessing medical marijuana cards.

In 2000 Colorado voters approved a measure to allow for the medicinal use of marijuana. Since then the State has seen a flurry of dispensaries opening to provide the drug to patients. Based on data from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), as well as anecdotal evidence, it seems that these cards are not very difficult to obtain, and it appears that this is quickly becoming a legal avenue for obtaining marijuana for people who may not necessarily have valid medical issues.

According to CDPHE since June 2001, 16,505 new patient applications have been granted; 73% of which were by male applicants. Additionally, in August of 2009 there were 3,700 applications submitted and every month there has been a significant increase in applications. Also, with more dispensaries opening in the State every month (there are now over 100) we are likely to continue to see the number of applications for medical marijuana licenses also increasing. This rapid increase of applications raises questions of the validity of those applying and seems to raise the question as to whether voter intent—to provide marijuana to patients who legitimately need it—is being fulfilled.

Additionally, undercover reporting by the 9 News 9Wants to Know team has led them to conclude that “anyone for any reason can get a doctor's prescription to buy medical marijuana - all they have to do is say they have pain and they don't have to offer proof” (9news.com). While this statement may not be factually accurate (a patient must convince a medical doctor that he or she has one of eight ailments to obtain a medical marijuana license), it does raise questions about the relative ease of convincing some doctors to sign a medical marijuana license for a patient.

GSCAPP supports the proposed legislative clarifications by Senator Romer and Representative Massey. Some of the key pieces of their bill:

- Dispensaries would be subject to regular auditing and reporting requirements
- Limits placed on the amount of marijuana produced and sold at any licensed facility
- Eliminate the loopholes through which patients can purchase from multiple dispensaries
- Punishment for the resale of legal marijuana
- And, much like with liquor sales, local governments will be empowered to license and regulate the dispensaries

As Romer and Massey say in their Denver Post article from December 14, 2009, “passing such legislation [would make] Colorado the first state in the country to create a reasonable and patient-focused medical marijuana regulatory model.” We support these efforts because without sufficient state or local

regulation, increased availability of marijuana may mean that more youth have access to the drug and we are concerned that they may not have the proper decision making skills to use it responsibly.

Second: What can parents tell their kids?

Despite the decision by Colorado voters to allow marijuana for medical use, marijuana is still an illegal substance. We continue to urge parents to have open and honest discussions with their kids about all drug use, especially marijuana. Marijuana use by teens in our Valley continues to be high--last year 43% of high school students reported ever using marijuana and 27% reported using it in the last 30 days.

Many kids turn to drug and alcohol to mask other problems in their lives. We know that when some kids feel stressed and depressed, they may seek refuge in self-medicating with marijuana, alcohol, and increasingly the misuse of prescription drugs. According to an MSNBC poll in 2007, 85% of teens reported feeling stressed at some point. That is 10% more than the rate reported by adults. Additionally, high stress teens are twice as likely as low stress teens to smoke, drink alcohol, and to use other illegal drugs (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University).

As parents we encourage you to look for signs of stress in your kids and to help and encourage them to find healthy ways of relieving it. Simply acknowledging their stress and giving them a safe place to talk things through can mean a lot to teens. Developing these “protective factors” for your kids can go a long way in helping them avoid drug and alcohol abuse. An Office of Drug Control Policy study shows that **kids who learn about the risks associated with drug and alcohol use from their parents are 42% less likely to use.**

As a coalition dedicated to the health and wellbeing of our community’s youth we continue to encourage parents to have these conversations with their kids and have an open and honest dialogue with them.

Thank you,

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