

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Marijuana Pros and Cons as of 2019”

Marijuana, or cannabis, was first used in Egypt 3,000 years ago and Britain's Queen Victoria was also prescribed tincture of cannabis. Yet, the Food and Drug Administration has not deemed marijuana safe or effective in the treatment of any medical condition. But, this has not stopped the drive for its legalization. Twenty-nine states, plus the District of Columbia, have now made marijuana available for medical—and, in some states, recreational—purposes. Consequently, we have seen a sharp rise in marijuana use and this has prompted major public health concerns. So, what are the harms or health benefits of “pot.” Research has yielded results to suggest that marijuana may be of benefit in the treatment of some conditions, such as chronic pain, alcoholism and drug addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and social anxiety, cancer, multiple sclerosis, and epilepsy. A large 2017 review found that marijuana, or products containing cannabinoids are effective at relieving chronic pain. Another 2017 review found that using marijuana may help people with alcohol or opioid dependencies to fight their addictions. But, other studies suggests that marijuana use actually drives increased risk for abusing, and becoming dependent on other substances. A review published in *Clinical Psychology Review* found some evidence supporting the use of marijuana to relieve depression and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Relative to cancer, evidence suggests that oral cannabinoids are effective against nausea and vomiting caused by chemotherapy. Some studies on cancer cells suggest that cannabinoids may either slow down the growth of or kill some types of cancer but other studies show that they are not effective at controlling or curing cancer. Oral cannabinoids may improve symptoms of spasticity among people with multiple sclerosis. Another 2017 study discovered that a marijuana compound called cannabidiol may be effective at easing seizures among children with Dravet syndrome, which is a rare form of epilepsy. The study also found a high rate of side effects linked to cannabidiol. More than 9 in 10 of the children treated with cannabidiol experienced side effects—most commonly vomiting, fatigue, and fever. A plethora of studies that have found negative associations between marijuana use and health, such as mental health problems, testicular cancer, and respiratory disease. Daily marijuana use is believed to exacerbate existing symptoms of bipolar disorder, suicidal thoughts and risk of depression. Regular marijuana smoking is linked to increased risk of chronic cough. A 2014 study suggested that it was plausible that smoking marijuana could contribute to lung cancer. Experts concluded, “There is unequivocal evidence that habitual or regular marijuana smoking is not harmless. A caution against regular heavy marijuana usage is prudent.”

In the America that I love, the jury is still out, and more research is needed immediately.

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