

"Is Medical Marijuana an Oxymoron?"

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No medical research has shown smoked marijuana to be safe, effective, or therapeutically superior to other substances. Synthetic tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, has been available for fifteen years in pill form (Marinol) to treat HIV Wasting Syndrome and chemotherapy-induced nausea. A legal drug, Marinol is the real "medical marijuana." It is available in measured doses and guaranteed purity without the adverse side-effects of smoking tars, hydrocarbons, and other combustibles. Furthermore, newer drugs like ondansetron and granisetron work better than Marinol, as clinical practice has demonstrated.

Objections about pills being difficult to swallow by nauseated patients are true for any antiemetic. If sufficient demand existed for an alternate delivery system, Marinol inhalants, suppositories, injections, or patches could be developed. Why isn't anyone clamoring to make all anti-nausea medications smokable? Why choose a substance and delivery system (smoking) that is more carcinogenic than tobacco when safer forms of the same drug are available? Patients deserve answers to these germane questions instead of being blind-sided by the "medical marijuana" drive.

The American Medical Association (AMA), American Cancer Society, National Multiple Sclerosis Association, American Academy of Ophthalmology, and National Eye Institute, among others, came out against "medical marijuana" initiatives as did former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. Anecdotal support for smoked marijuana reminds me of the laetrile incident where a drug derived from apricot pits was believed to cure cancer. Scientific testing disproved such testimonials. How do we know that testimonials touting marijuana as a wonder drug -- on the part of patients under the influence of an intoxicant, no less! -- may not simply demonstrate the placebo effect?

We shouldn't allow drugs to become publicly available without approval and regulation by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH). Such consumer protection has made our country one of the safest for medications. A political attempt to exploit human suffering to legalize an illicit drug is shameful and irresponsible. Voters should not be expected to decide which medicines are safe and effective. What other cancer treatments have been brought to the ballot box? Marijuana initiatives set a dangerous precedent. Decisions of this sort should be based on scientific proof, not popularity.