

Guest Opinion: The people chose medical marijuana

Published: Sunday, October 23, 2011

I take issue with the conclusions made by The Oakland Press concerning both the efficacy of medical marijuana and the Michigan Medical Marijuana Act. While I commend the paper for creating a forum to openly discuss medical marijuana, missing from the editorial, "Medical marijuana series sheds light on new law," were thoughts from those directly affected by the MMMA. Such exclusions fail to show readers the beneficial realities of medical marijuana.

To say "the bottom line is that marijuana does not reduce pain," is wrong. The editor ignores the findings by the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine in a March 1999 report, discovering beneficial uses for marijuana in treating or alleviating the pain, nausea, and other symptoms associated with debilitating medical conditions. According to the Michigan Department of Community Health, more than 25 percent of Michigan residents have sought treatment from a health care professional for a chronic pain condition in the past year.

The Oakland Press reporters have heard patients make statements that cannabis eases pain and helps decrease or eliminate opiate use. Many patients have previously been diagnosed with chronic pain, losing any sense of a quality of life because of the strong physical addiction opiates cause. Those patients receive the same benefits of pain relief from cannabis without the potential harmful side effects of prescription drugs.

The thinking employed is similar to many critics, including Senator Rick Jones from Grand Haven. Following a Lansing rally attended by more than 3,000 patients, caregivers and supporters attended, Jones reflected that many in attendance "did not look like patients," which begs the question – what does a patient look like? While Jones' assumption is disheartening, the bigger issue is a lack of education and acceptance of medical marijuana.

While our medical community freely prescribes opiates for pain relief, doctors and patients in Michigan desire other options. Residents of this state have a choice, overwhelmingly deciding that the treatment of debilitating conditions should include the option of medical marijuana. Most importantly, voters wanted physicians to aid in selecting a course of treatment, not law enforcement, government or prosecutors. Each patient arrest is more government intrusion in medical issues.

In addition, the notion that caregivers are “drug dealers” who “cut” medical marihuana with dangerous substances is false and insulting to the community. Advancements in caregiving have yielded medicinal marihuana that can target pain, nausea or loss of appetite while providing healthy methods of ingestion such as oils, lotions and edibles.

More than 60 percent of Michigan voters disagree with this editor's conclusion. Rather than criticize medical marihuana, a better approach would be to ask the patients if they are experiencing relief, and the residents if they are being harmed by the MMMA.

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