

Marijuana: “The Emperor Has No Clothes!”

1. We have heard a lot of talk from people who want to make money from growing and distributing marijuana, and those who want to tax those revenues. They favor legalization of marijuana for “recreational use” (and profits). But we haven’t heard much talk in these circles about the addictive properties of cannabis, or about preventing harm and helping folks who will be harmed directly and indirectly by its use. The DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) describes a substance use condition called Cannabis Use Disorder. The criteria are clear. Marijuana is addictive. Use can lead to dependency. Harmful effects follow. I have worked in addiction recovery for forty years. I have personally observed many negative effects from use and dependency on substances, including marijuana.
2. “Alcohol and other drugs” includes cannabis. Cannabis, like nicotine, alcohol, and narcotics, is an addictive substance, and when used, can lead to dependence and other adverse consequences.
 - a. It is widely recognized that nicotine is addictive, whether smoked or vaped. Although revenues are derived from the taxation of nicotine, how much money is poured into treatment of cancer, heart disease, lung disease and other conditions associated with nicotine use? Even now legislation is being considered to reduce harmful use of vaping products.
 - b. Alcohol is also notoriously addictive. Not everyone who drinks becomes dependent, but everyone who is dependent started with their first drink. While there is no doubt that alcohol is profitable, consider the costs. Sale of alcohol may lead to profits. Use of alcohol may lead to dependency.
 - c. Opiates are addictive, contributing to nearly one thousand overdose deaths in Connecticut last year alone. There have been discussions of placing constraints on big pharmaceuticals that have advertised for more profits, and for placing more effective controls on substances that are so evidently life threatening. But some suggest that adverse effects of narcotics (such as overdose) seem more pronounced than effects of marijuana, and therefore draw the conclusion that marijuana must be “less” dangerous. This carries over to the use of the phrase “recreational marijuana”. Will “recreational heroin” be on next year’s legislative agenda? Do some legislators believe that marijuana is harmless? Do some legislators believe that although it is dangerous to use narcotics, it is somehow safe to use marijuana without expecting consequences? “(Don’t use heroin, that’s dangerous, use marijuana instead, cannabis is “safer”). Comparing marijuana to narcotics does not remove adverse effects from marijuana, neither does it somehow make marijuana “safe”. Should we ask those who stand to make profits to define what is safe (Ask those who marketed candy cigarettes and promoted Joe Camel to urban youth. Or should we not rather ask the scientists, researchers, and those who have experienced dependence to describe the effects and consequences?
 - d. Cannabis is also an addictive substance, by any route of administration, whether ingested in candy form, brownie delights, or smoked in joints, blunts or bongs. Whether consumed legally or illegally, use may lead to dependency, criteria of which is denoted in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.

- e. It is ironic that even as Connecticut considers legislation to limit access to vaping products and narcotics due to the hazards of use, legislators focused on the potential lucrative profits of marijuana sales are choosing to ignore the well documented health hazards of increased cannabis use and, oddly in the case of marijuana, are in fact looking for ways to increase access and promote use and sales.
 - f. Also ironic is that while Connecticut led the nation in legislation promoting gun safety in order to reduce risk to Connecticut citizens, it now contemplates legislation that will increase harmful effects of substance use. Again, ironically, this is done with the knowledge that there are fewer gun-related deaths in Connecticut than overdose deaths. Should not the greatest care be taken in matters of such consequence?
 - g. National Institutes of Health indicate that “Recent data suggest that 30 percent of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder.¹⁸ People who begin using marijuana before the age of 18 are four to seven times more likely to develop a marijuana use disorder than adults.¹⁹” (National Institutes of Health National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018)
3. What is the human cost of “More flags, more fun”?
- a. Studies show that with more use comes more dependency. According to studies cited by NIH, approximately one in three persons using may develop dependency. Is there a tipping point when public health considerations outweigh business profits?
4. “First, Do No Harm”
- a. Neither legalization, nor using terms such as “recreational” removes or lessens the effects of marijuana on users.
 - b. In fact, legalization and normalization make substances more available. Increased use leads to increases in number of people affected, as well as increases in adverse effects.
 - c. An NIH report notes that “Marijuana significantly impairs judgment, motor coordination, and reaction time, and studies have found a direct relationship between blood THC concentration and impaired driving ability.⁷⁻⁹” (National Institutes of Health, National Institutes on Drug Abuse, 2018)
 - d. In 2015, about 4.0 million people in the United States met the diagnostic criteria for a marijuana use disorder (National Institutes of Health National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018)
 - e. “Research has shown...marijuana’s negative effects on attention, memory, and learning”
 - f. Considerable evidence suggests that students who smoke marijuana have poorer educational outcomes than their nonsmoking peers...They also had a much higher chance of developing dependence, using other drugs, and attempting suicide.⁵⁵ Several studies have also linked heavy marijuana use to lower income, greater welfare dependence, unemployment, criminal behavior, and lower life satisfaction.^{56,57} (National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018)
 - g. National Institutes of Drug Abuse indicates “Some research suggests that marijuana use is likely to precede use of other licit and illicit substances⁴⁶ and the development of addiction to other substances.” (National Institutes of Health National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018)

- h. It is further noted that “People who are more vulnerable to drug-taking are simply more likely to start with readily available substances such as marijuana, tobacco, or alcohol, and their subsequent social interactions with others who use drugs increases their chances of trying other drugs.” (National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2018)
5. Minimizing and justifying:
- a. Is marijuana “not” harmful because it is considered “less” harmful than other substances?
 - b. Does the word “may” (as in “may cause harm”) somehow remove consequences or justify the abdication of our social responsibility?
 - i. Nicotine use “may” lead to cancer. Should Big Tobacco keep selling and people keep smoking (and vaping) to find out who will and who won’t get cancer (after all, not all people do)?
 - ii. If the use of marijuana “may” lead to dependence and/or use of other substances, should sellers keep selling and users keep using to find out who will be among the thirty percent who become dependent (after all, only three in ten “may” develop dependency, and only four million people in America meet criteria for dependence, and of all those who use substances, “only” 1,017 people actually died from overdose in Connecticut last year, and “only” 1,038 the year before that.
 - c. Disclaimers do not mitigate dependency, neither do they absolve responsibility.
 - i. As disclaimers on cigarette cartons do not prevent cancer in those who smoke, disclaimers about addictive qualities of cannabis will not lessen the risks for those who do use.
 - ii. Disclaimers do not go far enough in promoting public health. Disclaimers are not a magic wand. Disclaimers do not take the money makers off the hook.
 - iii. Can selling more products that lead to addiction be justified by dedicating some of those profits to support more drug treatment now required by the increased consumption those very sales drive?
6. “Getting into the Game: Profits Before People?”
- a. Currently illegal, drug dealers and cartels promote the product. Growers, producers, distributors and legislators are lining up to get in the game.
 - b. Once legal, new players will jockey for market share, and are already positioning themselves.
 - c. Players will promote. More use = more sales. More sales = more money.
 - d. Big tobacco, Big alcohol, those now driving dollars for the cannabis industry, and perhaps in this case, those looking at putting more money into state treasuries, seek legalization, normalization, promotion, accessibility, sales, consumption, profits. But the faulty reasoning that stems from focusing only on profits ignores, evades or conveniently leaves out the “Cost of Doing Business”: consequences.
 - e. Marketing & Appeal
 - i. Psychoactive substances are appealing. Who wouldn’t like to have a high time?

- ii. Money is appealing: who wouldn't like to have more money?
 - iii. Marketing appeals to consumers. Promoters use appeal to sell more product. The more the appeal, the more the consumption. The more the consumption, the greater the profits.
 - iv. The face of the market is enjoyment of a product, which drives more sales, not the harmful effects of that product. "Give us the money, we will take it to the bank. You are on your own once the money changes hands—that is, from yours to ours." Sellers of harmful products want to make more money, not help more people.
- f. The flip side of "More use, more money" is "More use, more adverse consequences." The Cannabis "industry" is promoting legalization to make money by increasing accessibility. With increased accessibility comes increased use. With increased use come increased consequences. The more the use, the more the profits, but the more the use, the greater the harm.
- g. These consequences are not just more fun, for more people, to make more money, as promoters, marketers and lobbyists would have us to believe. Due to the addictive properties of substances, increased use leads to increased morbidity, and in some cases mortality.
- h. Winners and losers: Who profits, who pays?
- i. Sellers will make money, regardless of the product they sell.
 - ii. Consumers will pay. Sometimes they pay once, for the product. Sometimes they pay twice, when they suffer consequences. Sometimes they pay three times, when they pay for treatment of their condition. Sometimes they pay a price for which there is no remedy or compensation.
 - iii. The state of Connecticut could profit from tax revenues.
 - iv. The state of Connecticut will pay for treatment, lost employment, lost educational opportunities, increased harm, increased morbidity, increased health risks and safety concerns, and loss of leadership for the public good. Some of these losses are short term, others will take years, but the losses could in some cases be irreparable.
- i. Are we ready for these consequences? Does "more money" justify these consequences? Are the legislators who vote for this bill ready to assume financial responsibility for all the consequences that follow? Will more money be dedicated to prevention and treatment of consequences that will be exacerbated by this legislation?
- i. For those who promote sales for profits, are we advocating that our sons and daughters purchase more marijuana because now it is good for the economy?
 - ii. Should we advocate that young people get jobs in Big Cannabis to make money in the emerging industry with high profit potential without asking "At whose expense?" and "At what price?"
 - iii. Would we, if any of our sons or daughters were to become one of those unfortunate enough to develop such dependency and drop out of school? Would we encourage our sons and daughters to make money in an industry

which will lead to other young people dropping out of school even if they themselves did not? Does the money we might make justify the price that someone else must pay? Ironically, even as some communities struggle to address factors leading to increased absenteeism and poor academic performance in schools, legislators are getting on the profits bandwagon to make more money by selling marijuana, even while acknowledging the correlation between lower school attendance and performance for those who use.

- iv. “Cannabis before Community, or Equal opportunity harmfulness”:
 - 1. Rich communities should not profit at the expense of poorer ones. Majority communities should not garner prosperity from unfair advantage over minority communities. If making a profit itself is considered a social good, no matter what product is sold, no matter what harm might ensue from its sale, then everyone should have equal access to sell. In this argument, the state becomes the arbiter between some who would crowd others out, while protecting others who are fighting to get in. In this scenario, the state benefits in the end because, even as the playing field is leveled, everyone will be taxed. But what if selling a harmful product increases risk, is it then a community good because a profit was made and its sale is taxed? Throw the T(HC) into the harbor! Should not those of any community who enrich themselves by harming others be censored, rather than rewarded? Would it not be more honorable for Connecticut to protect equity for all citizens, in every community, who promote the public good, rather than those who benefit from its losses and profit from its harm? There is room at the table for all who promote the public good. However, can equity be assured for anyone who practices “I win, you lose, I profit, you pay”? Overdose and the industry that feeds it are not limited to any ethnicity. No one should be encouraged to contribute to the demise of another human being, whatever the profit might be.
 - v. Does the money we might make “cover the spread? Are we now willing to gamble the future of our children and our communities because even if some will lose, others will gain from their loss?
 - vi. We are not helping Connecticut parents if we make marijuana more accessible to our children.
 - vii. We do not help Connecticut communities by offering jobs, no matter how lucrative, in industries providing products that harm those communities.

7. Justification

- a. Do the justifications of those who make money selling a product--or in this case legalizing and normalizing that sale--assuage the pains or provide relief to those who become dependent on that product?

- b. The National Institutes of health notes that marijuana use has doubled in the last decade. As previously noted, NIH also notes that thirty percent of those who use marijuana develop cannabis use disorders, often including comorbidity with other substances and associated conditions.
8. The Price of Profits: Are we asking the right questions?
- i. One question some legislators, along with people who work for big tobacco, big alcohol, and big cannabis are asking is “How much money will be made with this new legal market?” “What will we gain?”
 - ii. Another question being asked is “Who will be making this money?” “Who will gain?” (and “What will be our share?”)
 - 1. “Do we want drug dealers to make all that money? If marijuana is legalized, the State of Connecticut and Big Business they tax will control the market and pocket the money. They will be the new, albeit now legal, drug dealers. Is that a good thing? Can they be trusted to be responsible for the consequences of their actions once they have pocketed the money?”
 - iii. Questions we do not hear these people asking are
 - 1. “Are we doing harm?” (Non maleficence, reducing public harm)
 - 2. “Are we doing good?” (Beneficence, increasing public good)
 - 3. “Will legalizing the market remove the addictive qualities of the substance and the deleterious consequences of its use?”
 - 4. “Will some who use the marijuana thus promoted and sold become dependent?”
 - 5. Will economic benefits for us today justify the price our children will pay tomorrow? Do such profits justify such losses? Is this merely the “cost of doing business”, and is this now acceptable because the loss is justified by the profits?
 - 6. “Will the people making the money by their promotion be held responsible for those who begin to use as a result of that promotion?”
 - 7. “Will those who promote use pay for prevention and treatment for those vulnerable to dependency?”
 - 8. “Do profits for big cannabis provide consolation to those most vulnerable to its proliferation?”
 - 9. “Because marijuana will be more accessible to young people, what will be done to mitigate the harm to young people, for whom marijuana will be more accessible?”
 - 10. “Because advertisers will promote their product, does making money justify the promotion of dependency?”
 - 11. “Will the price we pay be worth the profits we make?”
 - 12. “With increased accessibility, increased sales, increased revenues, what will be the costs of increased morbidity?”
 - 13. “What can we do to improve health outcomes for Connecticut citizens?”

- iv. Justification and compensation: “Will the revenues garnered make it alright for those who will suffer?”
 - 1. “Who will be responsible to make those who suffer whole?”
 - 2. “With our primary interest being to sell more product, are we then morally committed and legally obligated to making the people whole to whom we are now responsible for supplying product to?”
 - 3. How much money is set aside in the bill for prevention and treatment?
 - 4. Do the bills include language about penalties and claims?
- 9. The Price of Profits: Are we talking with the right people?
 - a. After listening to the lobbyists for this “emerging industry”, have we spoken with people in recovery and their families? Have we spoken with people who have been down the path of dependency, including people dependent on marijuana, including people who started with marijuana and are now using other substances as well or instead?
 - b. Have we spoken with people providing substance use prevention and treatment? Are we giving them tools to do their job? Or are people so excited to think about making the profits that they are forgetting the pain?
 - c. Have we spoken with the nearly one thousand families who lost loved ones in Connecticut related to drug overdose last year, and the nearly one thousand more in the year before that? And the nearly one thousand more in the year before that? Before you vote for this legislation, please talk with the families, not only those who want to use freely, but those who have suffered irreparable harm because of use. Do high times for some justify irretrievable losses for others? Before you vote, please speak to someone who has lost a loved one to addiction. Do not ignore, or discount, those who started with marijuana.
- 10. “Promotion & Profits -- or Prevention & Treatment: (“Who wins?”, or, “Will you match the money?”)
 - a. Prevention: Where in the bills are provisions made to match the amount spent on promotions by an equal or greater amount spent on prevention? How much money is set aside for prevention?
 - i. To be sure, Cannabis will advertise. Whose job, and whose money will prevention be? Bib business will promote. Connecticut will tax. Will big business and the state of Connecticut set aside enough money for substance abuse prevention to match the money spent on Cannabis promotion?
 - b. Treatment: Where in the bills are provisions made to match the amount of profits with the amount spent on treatment? How much will those who market and sell the product contribute to help those who are harmed by their product? How much money is set aside for treatment?
 - c. Remediation: How much money is set aside to cover employer losses, additional school counselors, legal costs, and alleviation of problems associated with increased use in school districts and neighborhoods?
- 11. How do we count? What [numbers] are we looking at?

- a. Marketers and Business people count profits: People who purchase = product sold = revenues generated. That is where they stop counting.
- b. They do not count: increase of sales = increase of use = proportional increase in consequences of use, costs for treatment, costs for “prevention” to counteract the waves of advertising and promotion, costs of lost education, costs of loss of time with family, impairment in daily functioning, unsuccessful attempts to quit, etc. Is dependency now a justifiable “cost of doing business”? Is that satisfactory to those who vote for this legislation?
- c. Do the numbers 1017 and 1038 seem large or small to you? The number of people who died in drug overdoses-nearly one thousand each year, are small in themselves when compared to number of dollars projected from cannabis sales and tax revenues--millions. However, we must note that the small number is people, the larger number is dollars. is there any numerical equivalent between dollars and lives? How many dollars in profit can compensate for even one individual harmed? Even the number 1 is large if it is your loved one who will not be coming home tonight.
- d. Have those who say that marijuana should be included among legitimate forms of adult entertainment
 - i. counted the cost of the risks associated with dependency, or
 - ii. considered the ways in which making substances with addictive properties more readily accessible create even more opportunities for abuse?
 - iii. Considered that normalization (e.g. “recreational use” implies “harmless fun”) leads to increased consumption. Increased consumption leads to increased consequences.
 - iv. Considered the irony that dependency may begin with enjoyment, but end in suffering
- e. Have inconvenient studies about adverse effects of marijuana and other drugs gotten conveniently buried in a pile of projected revenue reports?
- f. How much money will it take to rectify the damage which pumping millions of dollars of cannabis, enough to produce forty-five million dollars in revenues into Connecticut’s economy and social fabric will cause? That is a lot of money--because that is a lot of marijuana.

12. “Damages”

- a. Have we learned nothing from alcohol, tobacco and firearms? Big tobacco was sued because they used advertising techniques that targeted minors, urban youth in particular, and because people who used the tobacco products they promoted and sold developed cancer and other life -threatening medical conditions. Somehow the trail was noted, following the money directly to the promoters of the substance. in the end they couldn’t get away from their responsibility. Might those who legislate in favor of promoting harmful products be liable for damages tomorrow? The word damages implies harm. With all the information we have on substance use and dependency, is this even possible to ignore? Can marijuana growers and distributors be sued by a parent of a child who started with marijuana but ended up addicted to opiates?

- b. “Get into the game”: Some say legalization will eliminate the “black market. Then, sales of addictive substances will no longer be in the hands of dangerous cartels and street dealers. By voting to legalize, legislators will control the market and distribution. Then legislators will no longer be able to blame “drug dealers”. Legislators and business cronies will be the drug dealers. They must then assume responsibility for the consequences.
 - c. Some say legalization will reduce social injustice and racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Will it not be true that, in all communities, more use will lead to more consequences of that use? It is common knowledge that substance use affects every race, ethnicity, and social economic class, and those with fewer resources have fewer options for treatment. Who will provide social justice for them then? Whatever community you represent, if you pass me the joint, will you be responsible for my treatment?
13. “Pass the buck and kick the can”
- a. Do legislators feel comfortable with the mantra: “Profits come to us today, tomorrow let our children pay”?
 - b. Do legislators now in office subscribe to the philosophy of “once removed”? Are legislators shielded because they only “vote” to legalize cannabis but others will sell it and the consumer will buy it, so then they’re conveniently off the hook. (See “Blaming the Victim” below)
14. “Connecticut leads the way”
- a. Would it not be more honorable to become a state leading in substance use prevention and treatment, rather than becoming a leader in its promotion and use?
15. Ethical Considerations:
- a. Non-maleficence :“First, Do no harm”
 - i. Will legalization of marijuana harm some of our most vulnerable citizens?
 - b. Beneficence: “Do Good”
 - i. Is public health and the public good a priority for Connecticut legislators?
16. What’s in it for us?
- a. What is driving the desire to legalize— is it because of taxation for more revenue? Is it more business, more money? Is it more flags, more fun? Is it because other states such as Massachusetts and Colorado did it and now they are somehow “ahead”? Will some stand to score political points for an upcoming election cycle? Are we asking, “At what cost?” Do the ends now justify the means?
 - b. If we want the money from it, are we willing to assume responsibility for it?
 - c. If we follow the money then, it will lead directly back to the legislative chamber and those who desire to capitalize from this industry. Legislators and people in the business will not then be able to blame the drug dealers any more, as legislators and entrepreneurs will be organizing the new distribution network. This one will be on the state’s elected representatives as they vote, but the consequences will be felt by those whom the legislators represent. What will those consequences be?
17. “Blaming the victim”

- a. Individuals must take responsibility for their own actions. But there are public health considerations that extend to our society as a whole and how we can promote safety, health and well-being for everyone.
 - b. Big business will hire lawyers to mitigate harm to their profits, but not to remediate harms their products might cause. That, for them, is someone else's job. Whose job will it be?
 - c. Justified by new profits, distributors, and the legislators who vote for legalization will practice "blaming the victim".
 - i. Will those who vote to pass this legislation be able to print a disclaimer that cannabis use can lead to dependence and then go ahead and blame the users because you told them it might be bad for them? (After all, your money will already be in the bank)
 - ii. "It's good for you to buy the product and give us the money, but it's your bad if you get caught up."
 - iii. Have you put in set asides from your taxation revenues that help people who do become addicted and their families?
 - d. What about the people who will be hurt by this legislation—
 - i. those who become dependent, and their families
 - ii. the parents of young people who use,
 - iii. the teachers who will deal with the students who come to class high, or do not come to class at all
 - iv. those injured by impaired drivers
 - v. Those who attend districts experiencing high absentee rates, with substance use being one of many contributing factors
18. Who will be responsible, and Whose problem will it be?
- a. Will legislators, and people making new money be able then to say, "That's not our problem"?
 - b. Then whose problem will it be?
19. Guarantees: Recognizing that the sale of cannabis carries potential to produce financial gains, while at the same time causing harm to many Connecticut citizens, those voting to legalize marijuana must agree to:
- a. Match the money purveyors of cannabis spend on marketing with an equal or greater amount (from state coffers and sellers' proceeds) on prevention. Provide real numbers: If \$25,000,000 is spent on marketing, will \$25,000,000 be spent on prevention (to counteract the intended impact of \$25,000,000 marketing blitz?)
 - b. Match the money made in profits by the new business and state cannabis partners with an equal or greater amount spent on treatment and remediation for individuals, schools, employers, and all communities, agreeing to fully fund and assure adequate and equitable treatment opportunities for all consumers, and remediation for all losses incurred as a result of substance use in the community. Provide real numbers. (If it is anticipated that \$45,000,000.00 worth of marijuana floods the market, now "legally", will businesses who sell and states who legalize commit \$45,000,000.00 to treatment?)

- c. Will you as a legislator, voting for this increase in the distribution of addictive substances, pledge not to decrease funding for substance use treatment, and in fact increase funding commensurate with the increase in revenues?

Thank you for your consideration. Please send me your profit, revenues and loss projections and your prevention, treatment and remedies commitments at your earliest convenience. I look forward to hearing from you before the vote.

Respectfully, Paul Echtenkamp , Connecticut resident paule1517@gmail.com (860) 997-6634

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