

VICS Newsletter



Volume #1
Issue #10
June 2004

News and information on medical cannabis

VICS Source of Organic Cannabis Raided:

West Shore RCMP Raid Vancouver Island Therapeutic Cannabis Research Institute; Seize Medicinal Cannabis Supply of 390 Critically and Chronically Ill Users

At around 1 pm Thursday, May 27, the West Shore RCMP executed a warrant at the Vancouver Island Therapeutic Cannabis Research Institute (VITCRI), a medicinal cannabis research and cultivation facility. VITCRI was a lab-style production and research facility designed to ensure a safe and standardized source of organic medicine for the 390 members of the Vancouver Island Compassion Society (www.thevics.com), a long-standing Victoria non-profit compassion society.

"This is devastating", stated Philippe Lucas, founder and Director of the VICS. "With Health Canada bumbling the production and distribution of cannabis, we've strived to ensure the safety and quality of the VICS product by testing it for cannabinoids, heavy metals, and biological impurities; with the execution of a single warrant all of our members have been thrown back into the vagaries and uncertainties of the black market."

In a previous case involving the VICS, Lucas received an absolutely discharge and praise from the judge, who stated "Mr. Lucas enhanced other peoples lives at minimal or no risk to society. He provided that which the Government was unable to provide, a safe and high quality supply of marijuana to those needing it for medicinal purposes."

As a result of this police action against the VITCRI, that "safe and high quality supply" is no longer, and 2 men face serious charges for helping over 390 critically and chronically ill medicinal users. Since 90% of Canadians support the medical use of cannabis, and with Health Canada clearly unable to meet it's commitments to Canada's medicinal users, why are taxpayer money, and police and court resources still wasted on the arrest and prosecution of medicinal cannabis users and producers?

Hi Ho! Hi Ho! Black Marketing We Go!

Way to go folks. You just raided a facility (Vancouver Island Therapeutic Cannabis Research Institute, or VITCRI) that was devoted to producing high quality, organic cannabis in a controlled environment for distribution to the members of the Vancouver Island Compassion Society (VICS) as medicine for what ails them, as permitted by a physician (and at no cost to the taxpayer, but all that's going to change now prosecution is afoot). VITCRI was not a black market operation; it was created to grow the finest quality cannabis for therapeutic use. It also existed to carry out research and increase knowledge and understanding about the medicinal properties of *Cannabis Sativa L.* and *Cannabis indica L.* The lab-style cannabis cultivation and research facility included over 35 different strains tailored to treat different medical conditions.

When the RCMP raided the research facility, it forced the VICS to go back to the black market in order to supply cannabis to its members (now up to 400 people and still growing, regardless). Before the RCMP physically cut down the cannabis plants, they called Health Canada to verify the number of allowable plants but the call couldn't be made because Health Canada's offices (in Ottawa) were closed for the day. Rather than wait for a confirmation, they snipped it all down - better safe than sorry? Explain that, in person, to a HIV/Hep C patient experiencing severe nausea. Explain how, instead of a secure, organic supply of medicine, they will have to put up with an inferior, uncertain medicine from the street. This is how Canada treats ill people?

"For the last 15 months we've been off the black market completely and solely dependent on this facility for our supply. Now we're back on the black market." said Philippe Lucas, Director of the VICS. The police raid will have "a very dramatic effect" on the society.

Source: "Mounties' pot bust leaves patients without supply",
Times Colonist, May 30, 2004

Protest Planned

A protest/press conference is being planned for June 10, 2004 in front of the prosecutor's office, 880 Douglas St., at 1:00 pm.

If you want to show up and lend support, please meet at the VICS at 12:30 pm to walk over, or meet us at 1 pm. If you want to help, leave a message with the VICS at 360-8955, or send an e-mail to info@thevics.com.



If you would like to help the VICS and its members, call to protest the raid at VITCRI and the loss of safe, organic medicine for 390 members with doctors recommendation for the use of cannabis. Please be polite, but be firm about how this is an unacceptable act against a devoted supplier and researcher of medicinal cannabis, and please ask them to drop all charges and to give us our medicine back!

Officer in charge Corporal Kerr (250) 883-1084;
pager (250) 389-4618

Front Desk West Shore RCMP (250) 474-2264
Crown Prosecutor Michael Mark (250) 385-1383

BCCLA Conference on Prohibition in Vancouver, BC

The British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) held a one-day conference in Vancouver on May 8 to present a multi-disciplinary approach to law reform, specifically focusing on cannabis law reform but not exclusive of other prohibited substances. Titled "Beyond Prohibition", it intended to portray, from various viewpoints and approaches, what Canada would look like if cannabis were legal today. It posed the question; what is the best alternative to current prohibition?

Starting off the morning was none other than Vancouver's mayor Larry Campbell, who "didn't inhale" but was nonetheless fully supportive of legal and regulated sale of cannabis. The former RCMP officer and coroner would like to see a 'cannabis tax', similar to alcohol and tobacco, with all funds going to health care. He cited Amsterdam as a favourable working model, noting that Dutch teens smoke 1/3 to 1/2 less cannabis than their US counterparts. Prohibition, according to Mr. Campbell, is "a gateway to fascist tendencies" and firmly believes that Canada's drug policy is dictated by the US administration.

Philippe Lucas of Canadians for Safe Access and the Vancouver Island Compassion Society (VICS) spoke about the state of medical cannabis and related research in Canada today and where it should be going. Central to his discussion was Health Canada's medical cannabis, its quality and cost incurred (\$15,000 per ounce based on an estimated \$4.5 million spent thus far, and paid by taxpayer). As corroborated by further testing (see blurb this issue), the cannabis produced for Health Canada (HC) by Prairie Plant Systems, and intended for sick Canadians, comes in at 5% THC versus VICS organic cannabis at 19% THC. As well, while Health Canada is funding only one cannabis study at this moment, the VICS is involved with several studies, one of which will examine chronic pain and cannabis. Health Canada also provides cannabis seeds to those legal users who request them; Philippe Lucas ordered some only to discover that only 3 out of 10 seeds germinated (!), versus over 90% success rate with other seeds. As reported in the last issue, some legal users who requested HC cannabis are returning the pot and/or not paying due to poor quality. Philippe suggested that patients might like to do the same thing with their pharmaceutical drugs and return them when they're not performing as claimed or are causing severe discomfort and/or severe side effects.

Jeffrey Miron, a professor of post-prohibition economics from Boston University, specializes in the economic analysis of public policy, particularly on the economics of illegal drugs. He examines economic alternatives to prohibition and the economic implications of the alternative public policy. While acknowledging that medicalization of cannabis, decriminalization and/or government provision are popular with some reformers, Mr. Morin argues for full legalization where policy treats cannabis like any other good or product. He argues against a higher tax rate, or 'sin' tax, on cannabis as problematic because it perpetuates an image of 'sin', it often reflects political influences rather than valid economics, and it is hard to determine which goods cause the biggest externalities (to be taxed at a higher rate). Too much tax can drive it back underground, similar to prohibition. Contrary to conventional wisdom that legalization will produce large-scale economic benefits in the form of reduced costs of law enforcement and increased tax revenue, Morin suggests that the impact of cannabis legalization on government budgets will be probably modest. Basing tax calculations on a Canadian cannabis economy of roughly \$1 billion/year (10% of US cannabis market value of \$10 billion/year), and a \$0.75 billion/year industry if legalized, he has estimated a potential revenue stream of \$400-500 million/year from taxes. Savings in Canadian enforcement costs would be roughly \$300 million/year.

Walter McKay used to be a cop and drug-warrior, then one day he decided to pursue ethics instead. Now he works for and speaks on behalf of LEAP (Law Enforcement Against Prohibition), a group of current and former law-enforcement members who are disillusioned with the war on drugs. LEAP would prefer to see regulation and control rather than prohibition. The drug war (like all power and control issues) is about dehumanizing people and treating them as the faceless criminal, the 'other'. True policing concerns can be addressed when the burden of the social and health issues of drug use is lifted. The police need to be an agency of the community, for the community, a large part of which freely chooses to ingest cannabis.

Dr. Brian Emerson, a medical consultant with the BC Ministry of Health Services, provided an insight into the mind of BC Health, the public health model, and its approach to cannabis. With a stated goal to maximize benefits and minimize harm, Dr. Emerson presented some general guidelines to maintain public health, but contributed little to the direct knowledge of cannabis and public health. Obviously there are harm issues if cannabis (or other substance) is abused and much more research is needed, but is it coming from the Ministry of Health? There was little indication that the ministry is being proactive on this issue. While BC Health is working with the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse on an Addictions Survey that will interview 1000 Canadians, we need public health policy that is more in tune with the times. And while the federal government gets involved criminally, it is up to the provincial government to develop suitable health programs.

Dr. Tod Mikuriya, a doctor of psychiatry in California, filled in for Steph Sherer of Americans for Safe Access who was unable to speak. Dr. Mikuriya is at the center of the storm around US physicians prescribing cannabis for medical purposes - currently he is on probation for 5 years, plus a fine, for his involvement. He spoke on the California model of medical cannabis and Proposition 215. Dr. Mikuriya described the Californian scene when the AIDS epidemic broke loose, and the discovery that cannabis alleviated the nausea associated with the drug cocktails and chemotherapy. From there, cannabis co-ops and clubs formed with a conscious effort towards harm reduction and improvement of the quality of life of those ill and dying. Recent victories over the federal Drug Enforcement Administration have begun to secure the rights of individuals using medical cannabis.

Hilary Black and Rielle Capler of the British Columbia Compassion Club Society (BCCCS), Vancouver's oldest, and only, compassion club, spoke about why we were all there in the first place, and ramped it up a notch with their presentation of "A Roadmap to Compassion" (also available in hard copy, with Philippe Lucas as third author). The document outlines the implementation of a working medicinal cannabis program in Canada. Although the report discusses what has gone wrong with Canada's medical cannabis endeavor, the document focuses on what is working now to meet the needs of sick Canadians and presents a future plan. Simply, the future of a successful program should focus on the distribution model that has already proven itself to be safe; not-for-profit distribution by community-based compassion societies. The hope is to create a humane, care-giving model with licenced, regulated compassion clubs that serve up a variety of cannabis strains, in a variety of forms, in a safe environment to patients who have the permission of their family doctor. Not-for-profit cultivation of organic, regulated cannabis would be undertaken by private cultivators, where knowledge and genetics are shared to create the highest quality medicine. The regulation of the services provided by compassion societies could follow a document created by the BCCCS called "Operational Standards for the Distribution of

Medical Cannabis". If cannabis was legalized, Hilary Black suggested that revenues collected (tax) be used to subsidize alternative health care, where choice of treatment is guaranteed with the sole purpose of healing people. With over 7000 Canadians being served by compassion clubs, it's time to open the door, extend a hand, and bring the compassion clubs into the legal mainstream.

Professor Peter Cohen from Holland was next with a presentation titled "Irrelevance of Drug Policy". Prof. Cohen was the Director of the Centre of Drug Research at the University of Amsterdam until his retirement earlier this year, and has published widely. In a nutshell, global drug policy with respect to cannabis has had little effect on its consumption. In fact, Prof. Cohen thinks it has had zero effect. "Prohibition has created a self-serving system to maintain prohibition". Using data from surveys conducted between 1997 and 2001 in several cities around the world, he concluded that while numbers of drug users typically increased as one went from a rural to an urban environment (higher population density), drug usage patterns were similar. He feels that drug policies have failed and need revision, and feels that the bloated, bureaucratic machines that oversee policy such as medical cannabis are victims of a drug policy created in an atmosphere of fear. To this end, Prof. Cohen would like to see an international university specifically for drug policy development.

Wendy Little and Eric Nash spoke about their organization (Island Harvest Certified Organic Cannabis) on Vancouver Island that cultivates certified organic cannabis under legal licence for legal users. While there are numerous myths and realities of cultivating cannabis perpetuated by government, law enforcement and the media, Wendy and Eric have followed the rules and used common sense to provide a safe, secure environment to produce cannabis. Throughout the presentation, they referred to the report "Green Tide - Marijuana Cultivation and Its Impact on Ontario" which accounts for many potentially dangerous features of a growing facility. For each point in the report, Wendy and Eric showed how they tackled the problem and solved it. Mould? Try ventilation and filtration. Unsafe electrical system? Hire an electrician. It's not necessarily the way black market, commercial growers might operate, but Wendy and Eric demonstrated that it can all be done safely and in a manner that does not harm or alienate the community. In fact, they discovered that their own community is aware and supportive of the medical cannabis operation.

Keith Stroup, the founder and current executive director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), spoke about international obligations. 700,000 Americans are arrested each year on cannabis charges, and 88% are for simple possession. The pursuit of prosecution costs \$10 billion/year, it invades privacy and destroys thousands of functioning lives of Americans. NORML supports the elimination of all penalties for personal use of cannabis and supports the establishment of a legally regulated market. Mr. Stroup encouraged Canadians to continue the fight, and said "don't underestimate the influence of Canada on the US". Today, according to Stroup, 72% of US citizens believe that cannabis ingestion is only worth a fine. He pointed out that, although international obligations are often regarded as an impediment to cannabis law reform, individual nations possess wide-ranging flexibility regarding their drug policy despite existing international commitments. In reality, the treaties are a paper tiger, they can be changed if there is the political will - it is the prohibitionists that pose the greatest barrier to reform.

Eugene Oscapella, a barrister and solicitor who has published widely on drug policy, was succinct and clear in his presentation on Regulatory Options. The goals of a legal and responsible cannabis industry would be to: 1) eliminate harm associated with

prohibition, 2) develop own policies, 3) free up access, 4) develop lawful industry, 5) improve quality control, 6) reduce harmful use, 7) promote research, 8) reduce marginalization, 9) keep discussion open, 10) develop code of responsible use, and 11) end hypocrisy.

Legal obstacles include: 1) international treaties such as UN Conventions Act (now 60 years old), and 2) domestic law.

Domestic political obstacles include: 1) politicians who oppose reform for fear of not being (re)elected, and 2) bureaucracies.

International political obstacles include: 1) international organizations (maintain jobs), and 2) the US administration. Other obstacles include: inertia (lack of lobby, voice), "class immunity", those who profit from current system, uncertainty of direction of cause, and, the all time winner, fear. What route do we choose; medicalization, decriminalization or legalization? What can we tolerate?

The Honourable Senator Pierre Claude Nolin, the final speaker of the day, expressed the sentiment of many before him stating that cannabis should be legalized and regulated. "When the policy is zero tolerance, it's stupid."

Do we remember the LeDain commission of the early 1970's? Not much has really changed at the street level since that report came out concluding that the criminalization of cannabis had no scientific basis; Canadians have been, and are, using cannabis responsibly and carrying on with their lives as they have done for the last thirty (forty?, sixty?) years, regardless of its illegal nature. At the same time, roughly 600,000 Canadians have received criminal records due to cannabis prohibition. Senator Nolin feels that governments around the world will, in the names of transparency and honesty, acknowledge the massive failure of prohibition. Discussion must be, in his opinion, open, honest and respectful. He feels that the war on drugs is outdated and that our politicians and citizens need to begin a dialogue that embraces health and establish a positive, inclusive drug policy. "Governments react to populations. It's not the other way around." Senator Nolin also feels that cannabis legalization may not happen in Canada without the US going along with it. Is that too huge a challenge? Some say there's more support down south than we think.

Stay tuned for more news from the prohibition front.

Many thanks to Kirk Tousaw, the BCCLA and the Wosk Centre for Dialogue for a stimulating, well presented day.

Arrest Handbook:

Do you know the difference between detention and arrest? Do you know your rights when face to face with a personal search, vehicle search and/or location search? What is a surety?

If you're unsure or don't know, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA) has published a compact and useful book titled "[The Arrest Handbook - A Guide to Your Rights](#)", by David Eby (copies can be ordered from <http://www.bccla.org>, or call (604) 687-2919).

Weighing in at a little over 60 pages, the book describes your rights and responsibilities when dealing with the police, with special sections on mental health detentions, civil disobedience and protest, poverty law and anti-terrorist law, plus definitions and useful phone numbers. Some excerpts are:

"You always have the right to remain silent; you only have to give police your name and address if: 1) you are under arrest; 2) you are driving a car (passengers can remain silent); and 3) a police officer is giving you a ticket (for breaking city bylaw or other law) or serving you an appearance notice." Keep this one in mind... "Police officers are allowed to lie". They can manipulate any situation they wish - remain silent and speak to your lawyer.

A mini pocket-version is also available; keep a copy in your car.

Medical Cannabis News:

Canada - Bayer Bids on Cannabis-based MS Treatment

Pharmaceutical giant Bayer HealthCare has applied to market a cannabis-based drug in Canada. If approved, it would be the first legally available cannabis-based drug available in Canada for the relief of debilitating symptoms of multiple sclerosis and severe neuropathic pain.

Bayer and GW Pharmaceuticals of Britain announced May 11 they had filed a new drug submission to Health Canada for 'Sativex', an oral spray developed by GW Pharmaceuticals and licenced to Bayer. Approval takes roughly 18 months.

Dr. Paul O'Connor, a neurologist in the MS Clinic at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, said some of his patients use marijuana to control the pain and spasticity. "A lot of the patients that do smoke it wish that there was a more convenient and non-smokable but effective form of a cannabinoid available.

(Hmmm, sounds like Dr. Connor has not heard of the VICS sublingual cannabis spray called 'Cannamist')

Source: "Bayer bids to market Pot-based drug"

<http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v04.n716.a01.html>

US - Montel Williams uses medicinal cannabis for MS

Montel Williams threw his support behind legalizing medical cannabis in New York, saying that it helps him cope with multiple sclerosis. Diagnosed since 1999, Mr. Williams has used cannabis regularly to relieve the severe pain in his legs and feet. He recalled how prescription painkillers, and even morphine, failed to control his tremors and spasms.

Williams says he can legally obtain medical cannabis in California, where he owns property, and argues that he should have the same right in New York. There is a proposed law in New York to prescribe cannabis to terminally ill patients suffering from severe pain.

Source: "Montel Williams supports medical marijuana"

<http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v04.n709.a09.html>

Health Canada Cannabis Tested Again:

Another independent lab has tested a sample of Health Canada's medical cannabis, side-by-side with a sample from the Vancouver Island Compassion Society.

The numbers are notable because a) they confirm the strength of the VICS cannabis tested (19% THC), and b) they confirm that Health Canada cannabis is weak, testing at 5.0% THC (again).

The VICS wishes Pierrette Lucas a swift recovery, with all our love, and thanks to Dave for last issue's cartoon. FILL THE HILL!!

Cannabis News:

Canada - Pot decriminalization bill dies on the table

Bill C-10, the revised decriminalization bill presented by the Martin Liberal government, died on the House of Commons table with the announcement of an upcoming federal election in July 2004.

The proposed legislation would have decriminalized cannabis possession to a fine of no more than \$500 but would have increased the penalties for cultivation and distribution.

The opposition Conservatives, who opposed the bill, insisted that the Liberals effectively killed the bill by treating it with deliberate neglect.

Source: "Liberals prepared to allow marijuana bill to die", The Globe and Mail, May 8, 2004



Russia - Drug possession decriminalized

In a move that makes Canada look like a lame duck (but in all honesty, we're glad Bill C-10 is dead), President Vladimir Putin signed an amendment to the Criminal Code in December 2003 stipulating that possession of what amounts to ten times the amount of a 'single dose' would now be considered an administrative infraction rather than a criminal offence.

The definition of a 'single dose' for various drugs then took five months to hammer out.

As of May 12, ten times the amount of a single dose is either 20 grams of cannabis, 5 grams of hashish, mescaline or opium, 1 gram of heroin or methamphetamine, or 0.003 grams (3 micrograms) of LSD. Punishment will be a fine of no more than 40,000 rubles (\$1880 Cdn) or community service. Anyone caught in possession of these amounts or less cannot be legally detained, a spokeswoman for the Moscow Branch of the Federal Anti-Drug Service said.

The amounts were recommended by a group formed by the State Duma's Legislative Committee that included representatives from the Health, Justice and Interior ministries, the FSB (?) and several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's).

Source: "No more jail term for drug possession", The Moscow Times, May 14, 2004. <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v04.n729.a01.html>

Donations of ANY kind will be much appreciated

RESOURCE DIRECTORY:

AIDS Vancouver Island

1601 Blanshard, 384-2366

Hep-C Society of Canada

219-2750 Quadra, 388-4311

MS Society

1004 N.Park, 388-6496

V.P.W.A.

330-1105 Pandora, 382-7927

Law Centre

388-4516

Sacred Herb

106-561 Johnson, 384-0659

<http://www.sacredherb.com>

John W. Conroy, Q.C.

1-877-852-5110 (toll free)

<http://www.johnconroy.com>

BCCCS

Vancouver, 604-875-0448

<http://thecompassionclub.org>

Action Committee of People

with Disabilities

383-4105

Canadians for Safe Access

<http://www.safeaccess.ca>

Canadian Cannabis Coalition

<http://www.cannabiscoalition.ca>

Canada Medical Marijuana

<http://www.medicalmarihuana.ca>

Media Awareness Project

<http://www.mapinc.org>

DrugSense

<http://www.drugsense.org>

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/ocma/>

1-866-337-7705

Norml Canada

<http://www.normlcanada.org>

Cannabis Health

<http://www.cannabishealth.com>

Cannabis Research Institute

<http://www.cannabisresearchinstituteinc.com>

"Give to every other human being every right you claim for yourself."

-- Robert Green Ingersoll