

VICS Newsletter



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News and information on medical cannabis

Medical Cannabis News:

Canada - What Court Ruling? What Program? What Sick People?

Health Canada (HC) is dragging its feet with respect to last October's Ontario Appellate Court ruling that tinkered with the "unconstitutional" Medical Marihuana Access Regulations (MMAR), and also re-illegalized cannabis possession. While the police are once again busting folks, Health Canada has yet to make the required court-ordered changes to the medical cannabis program. The court decision removes the need for a second physician to endorse a patient's application to receive medical marijuana, allows a designated grower to be compensated by the eligible patient receiving the medical cannabis, allows a designated grower to grow for more than one patient, and allows designated growers to share premises for cultivation purposes.

Apparently the HC lawyers are still reviewing the ruling but HC officials indicated that they felt that the decision had no impact on the legality of compassion clubs and that they are still operating outside the law. According to HC media spokesperson Cathryn Saunders, they have until December 5 to determine if they are going to appeal the decision.

"Sadly, Health Canada has turned what should be an important health issue into a court matter," says Alison Myrden, one of the Hitzig complainants and a legal cannabis user. "Their inaction is literally putting lives at risk." Lawyer Alan Young added, "If they're not implementing (the decision), they are in contempt of court. Period."

Furthermore, this is not the first time - Mr. Young has been in court several times against Health Canada, giving the solid impression that there is little, if any, political will regarding medical cannabis. All efforts are met with resistance and, tragically, sick people are left in the lurch, again.

Philippe Lucas of Canadians for Safe Access questions why HC is prolonging the suffering of ill citizens. A 2003 study out of Ontario reveals that almost one in three HIV-positive patients in Ontario use cannabis for medical reasons, further evidence of the need for a program that serves to improve the health of Canadians. Mr. Lucas stated "We could learn much more from the Dutch medical cannabis program, where cannabis is immediately available with a simple doctor's recommendation. The success of our national medical cannabis program depends upon its immediate decentralization; as the Ontario HIV/AIDS study shows, people's lives depend upon safe access to cannabis right now."

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1762.a03.html> and CSA press release "Health Canada Inaction"

*Thanks to all members who have been bringing gifts to the VICS for all to enjoy. And thanks to the sun that keeps our bones warm - welcome back!
Happy Solstice and New Year to all. PEACE*

US - Probation granted for medical pot growers/distributors

Three men who ran the defunct Los Angeles Cannabis Resource Center, and were charged with possessing, distributing and manufacturing illegal drugs, were each sentenced Nov. 24 to one year of probation, random drug testing, up to 250 hours of community service and a \$100 fine. According to the defendants, the center followed the letter of the law as dictated in state Proposition 215, the nation's first medical marijuana law passed in 1996, and served up medicinal cannabis to 960 patients suffering from terminal or serious illness under recommendation from physicians. Charges were laid because the US Supreme Court has ruled that federal law banning the possession and distribution of cannabis overrules state law; since the high court ruling, 45 Californians have been arrested on federal charges for activities that are legal under state law.

US District Judge A. Howard Matz, in reducing their sentences, applied a rarely used doctrine known as lesser harm, where "a defendant may commit a crime in order to avoid a perceived greater harm". The judge also felt that the entire prosecution was "badly misguided" and stated that he was baffled and disturbed that the DEA and prosecutors wasted so much time and money in prosecuting the case.

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1826.a06.html> and <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1826.a07.html>

Sign Of The Times:

Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) has confirmed that it has received a claim for a supply of medical cannabis stolen from a Regina residence. The claim may be the first of its kind for SGI. "If you have home insurance and it's a medical supply, there would be coverage," said SGI spokesperson Earl Cameron. "It's no different than prescription drugs."

If the stolen pot is to be replaced instead of a cash settlement, the cannabis would have to come from Health Canada. If your medicine didn't come from Health Canada to start with (meaning it's probably of reasonable strength), why would you want to make a claim and then get ~3% THC cannabis instead?

Dave MacLean, provincial director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, says his organization takes no issue with the provincial insurance agency covering a licensed user's supply. "We don't see a problem with that, we don't see a difference whether it's prescribed Percoset or medical marijuana." While a communication director for the Saskatchewan Medical Association used the opportunity to point out the dangers of placing an illegal substance in doctor's offices ("...this does put an exclamation point to what we've been saying."), a spokesperson for the Regina Police Service says they aren't concerned about the supply of medical cannabis in people's homes sparking crime.

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1791.a10.html>

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Drug Policy Alliance Conference:

The Drug Policy Alliance held their 2003 conference in early November at the New Jersey Meadowlands, the first since Albuquerque in 2001. About 525 people registered with another 200 invited speakers.

Feedback was generally positive and many felt that the conference was diverse and packed with useful information; topics ranged from lobbying tactics to the war on pain patients and doctors to psychedelic consciousness. One of the distinct highlights was a plenary session dedicated to "Those Crazy Canadians". Joining Philippe Lucas of the VICS and Canadians For Safe Access (CSA) were three other notable Canucks: Sen. Pierre Claude Nolin, current Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell and his immediate predecessor Philip Owen. Recent events in Canada - safe injection site in Vancouver, federal decriminalization bill in the works, October's appeal court ruling on medical cannabis - have created interest and optimism among drug reformers, especially among Americans battered by an intransigent Bush administration.

Mr. Lucas waged in and spoke about the failures of the MMAR and illustrated, by way of photos and test data, the poor quality of the cannabis produced by Prairie Plant Systems intended for sick Canadians and paid for by taxpayers. The VICS, however, isn't standing still as a compassion society and is participating in several research protocols. Lucas said that "research of the type that we are engaged in is an act of social activism in and of itself."

Both Owen and Campbell spoke about Vancouver's solution to drug use/abuse that is based upon an approach termed the 'Four Pillars' - prevention, treatment, harm reduction, law enforcement. The process, still under development as new lessons are learned, obligates the public health officials, social service providers, media and the public to work together. "You can't incarcerate your way out of this," said Owen. "You can't liberalize your way out, you can't ignore it, so you have to manage it."

Sen. Nolin called for a regulated legalization process for illicit drugs basing his conclusion on "ethics, science, penal law and the appropriate role of the state." The state must play a role, said Nolin, because drug use is a public health issue and "because we've rejected zero tolerance as a viable option."

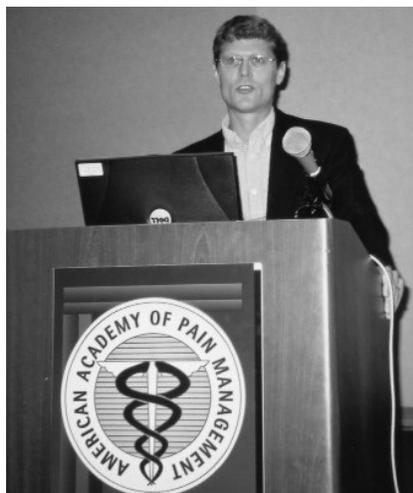
The conference ended with the public premiere of a video titled "Busted: The Citizen's Guide to Surviving Police Encounters" produced by Flex Your Rights (<http://www.flexyourrights.org>).

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1765.a04.html>

More Big Pharm.....

The pharmaceuticals industry is the most profitable of any industry. Ranked by percentage return on revenues, 2001, pharmaceuticals came in at about 18.5%, with commercial banks, perceived as thieves, second at slightly over 13% return. How do you like them apples?

AAPM Conference 2003



Phil working the crowd in Denver

The VICS Medicinal Cannabutter Recipe

Makes about 1 1/2 lbs. of cannabutter

Supplies:

Cannabis leaf (no stems)
6 to 8 litre (1.5 gallon) capacity boiling pot
2 lbs. (0.9 kg.) butter, salted or unsalted
Fine mesh strainer, or colander, or large coffee filter, or nylon stockings
Large refrigerator-safe pot

1. Fill a 6 to 8 litre pot 1/3rd full with densely packed cannabis leaf. Fill remainder of pot with cool water and bring to a boil.
2. Reduce heat and allow to simmer for 45 minutes.
3. Strain out water and return leaf to the pot. Replenish with clean water.
4. Bring pot to boil, add butter and mix. Lower heat and simmer for 2 to 3 hours, stirring occasionally (add water if necessary).
5. Strain out liquid into refrigerator-safe bowl using a fine strainer, large coffee filter or even nylons. Squeeze butter out of remaining leaf (wear gloves, the leaf is hot!). Discard strained leaf.
6. Let liquid cool and then put into refrigerator overnight. Butter will separate from the water and form a hard crust on the surface of the liquid.
7. Lift out butter crust and put in large mixing bowl. Cream and fold butter using a large spoon. Discard remaining liquid.

The butter is ready to use as is. It will keep in a freezer for up to 3 months. When baking with cannabutter select recipes with short, low heat cooking requirements (like cookies) or else the cannabinoids will break down while cooking.

Products baked with cannabutter will take effect within 30 to 90 minutes from initial ingestion. For maximum effect, ingest on an empty stomach.

Cannabis butter can have a very strong narcotic effect. It is recommended that you do not drive or perform difficult tasks after eating cannabutter products.

The VICS Medicinal Cannabis Oil Recipe (a non-dairy option)

Supplies:

Cannabis leaf (no stems)
Olive oil
Cheese cloth
Crock pot

1. Heat 1 cup of olive oil to just below simmering (don't let it boil) in crock pot.
2. Add equal measure of cannabis leaf.
3. Stir and allow the oil and cannabis to heat up for several hours.
4. Strain the oil through cheese cloth and allow to cool (discard leaf).

Or for a stronger product:

5. Add fresh cannabis to previously heated oil in crock pot and keep cooking on low heat overnight or up to two days, then strain the oil and allow to cool (discard leaf).

The oil is ready to use as is. It will keep in a refrigerator for up to 3 months. Cannabis oil can have a very strong narcotic effect. It is recommended that you do not drive or perform difficult tasks after consumption.

Winter Solstice:

Pagan, Christian, Druid, whoever. The rebirth of the sun, on or around December 22 of each Julian calendar year, remains one of the key celebrations of death, life and renewal in human times for those who live (or have lived) in the northern hemisphere (the southern hemisphere experiences the shortest day of the year, their winter solstice, on or around June 20 or 21). It is symbolic of the seemingly endless cycle of life that is universal. Thanks to DebO for her contribution below of a very brief history of the winter solstice:

Solstice:

The long sequence of holy days around Yule is related to the old Roman celebration of Saturnalia, a time of intense merrymaking.

The Yule festivities, which begin just before the winter solstice, include the blank day of the Celtic tree calendar (23 December), continue with Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day (in Britain a day for giving boxed-gifts to servants), and incorporate New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. New Year's Eve (starting at sunset on 31 December) is known in Scotland by the Pagan name of Hogmanay, after the Celtic solar deity known variously as Hogmagog, Gogmagog, or Ogmios.

The Yule festival ends at Twelfth Night, when the final trappings of Yuletide must be removed. In the circle of Twenty-four runes, this time of year is ruled by the rune Jara, which has the meaning of the completion of the year, the enjoyment of the fruits of the harvest at the Yuletide feast. Of course, the major event of Yuletide is the feast itself, where all manner of food and drink is consumed. Yuletide is without doubt the major sacred meal of the year, a continuing expression of the Pagan holy feast tradition.

The traditional sigil of Yuletide is an enclosure containing dots, symbolizing the seed in the ground, or people sheltering from the wintry weather.

(from "Pagan Book of Days")

21 December:

The Druidic Alban Arthurian, and Christian St. Thomas's Day, when the poor are traditionally given money or presents. In former times the needy could ask for money, a practice known as "thomasing" or "mumping". The fourth station of the year signifies enlightenment, when the light is reborn within the womb of darkness.

(from "Pagan Book of Days")

Yule:

A Wiccan festival celebrated on or about December 21, marking the rebirth of the Sun God from the Earth Goddess. A time of joy and celebration during the miseries of winter. Yule occurs on the winter solstice.

(from "Wicca...")

Yule marks the winter solstice, the time of year when mother goddesses - like Astarte of Canaan, Ishtar of Mesopotamia, Isis of Egypt, and Myrrha of Greece - traditionally gave birth to the sun. The feast of Imbolg ("in the womb") signifies the Goddess as Mother Earth, full with child. It was during this Feast that the Irish Celts welcomed the goddess Brigit ("the Shining One"), whose spirit was thought to permeate an effigy that had been specially prepared for the festival. Brigit then journeyed throughout Ireland, blessing fields and forests. In ancient Greece, early February marked the lesser Eleusinian festival of Demeter and Kore.

(from "The Goddess")

Sources:

"The Pagan Book of Days", by Nigel Pennick, 1992. Destiny Books, Vermont, USA.

"Wicca - A guide for the Solitary Practitioner", by Scott Cunningham, 1998. Llewellyn Publications, St. Paul, USA.

"The Goddess", by Shakrukh Husain, 1997. University of Michigan Press, USA.

Feeling Bloated? Got An Itch?:

Prescription drugs, pharmaceutical companies, mega-profits, even while markets dropped. In 2001, the Fortune 500 corporations lost 53% of their value. At the same time, drug company profits shot up by 32%. In 2002, pharmaceutical companies raked in \$400.6 billion. For example, Claritin (allergy medication by US giant Schering-Plough) has world-wide annual sales of \$3 billion. This is just one drug, and one that isn't going to set disease on its proverbial ear. Drug companies are quick to point out the millions of dollars re-invested in research and development of new drugs. The industry claims it spends \$800 million to bring a new drug to market; however, they never reveal the cost since it would give away trade secrets. According to Pharmaceutical Executive, over \$500 million was spent promoting the 6 top-selling drugs in 2002.

It is painfully obvious (pun intended) that big bucks shape the industry and this has resulted in a shift from drugs that cure to drugs that sell. Well-heeled Western consumers account for most drug sales. Developing countries with 80% of global population account for only 10% of global drug sales. The whole of Africa's drug bill is just 1% of the world total. Only 10% of global health research (private and public combined) is devoted to diseases that account for 90% of the world's disease burden.

Generic, cheaper drugs are available for a few remedies, but the public will have to wake up and strongly demand less-expensive drugs. Genuine reform of the industry includes: purging the pharmaceutical lobby from the seats of political power; rescuing research from corporate control so that it can focus on genuine health needs; freeing up countries to produce and buy generic drugs; prioritizing domestic health needs; and discouraging frivolous 'lifestyle' medication.

However, don't think these companies are going to change tomorrow or feel especially altruistic in the near future. As Bernard Lemoine, director-general of France's National Pharmaceutical Industry Association, put it: "I don't see why special effort is demanded from the pharmaceutical industry. Nobody asks Renault to give cars to people who haven't got one."

Source: "The great health grab", New Internationalist, Issue 362, November 2003. (<http://www.newint.org>)

Truth in Marketing 101

In the quest to create the 'ultimate' vehicle for the urban road warrior, automobile manufacturers have been spewing out one SUV model after another. One company has now come out with an 8-passenger beast that is called the ".... Armada". Imagine that, naming a vehicle after a fleet of warships. What exactly is this SUV capable of? Lobbing bombs? Ramming errant cars? Capturing booty? Aarrgghh mateys! We humbly suggest that if they wish to use grandiose names then perhaps (over)size and (in)efficiency could be the inspiration and then there could be, for example, the "...Behemoth", or the ".... Juggernaut", or perhaps the ".... Blowhard"**.

** (don't get any ideas car companies)

Definitions:

solstice *n.* **1.** either time (**summer, winter**, ~, about 21 June, 22 Dec.) at which sun is farthest from equator and appears to pause before returning. **2.** point in ecliptic reached by sun at solstice. **3.** So **solstitial** [Middle English from Old French, from Latin *solstitium* (*sol* sun, *sistere* *stit-* make stand)] (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th ed., 1983)

incorrigible *a.* (Of person or habit) incurably bad or depraved; not readily improved; hence ~IBILITY *n.*, ~IBLY *adv.* [Middle English from Old French, or from Latin *IN(corrigibilis CORRIGIBLE)*] (ibid)

Cannabis News:

Canada - Corrections Officer Gets Probation for Growing Pot

A man who grew cannabis in his backyard while working as a correctional officer at a youth prison in Burnaby was ordered to perform 70 hours of volunteer and community work and put on probation for a year.

Suffering from chronic pain caused by a knee injury while at work in 1989 and subsequent surgery and drugs that didn't relieve the pain, Daniel Hogan decided to grow his own medicinal cannabis to avoid supporting organized crime by buying on the street. He chose not to apply for the legal exemption status through the Health Canada MMAR because his employer, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, would have been notified.

Twenty-six plants were found growing in a shed in his back yard (undisclosed in court how they discovered them) and he was charged with cultivation and possession of cannabis with intent to traffic (latter thrown out). Mr. Hogan was fired 3 months later. His physician has confirmed Mr. Hogan's health problems and suggested the use of cannabis for pain relief and appetite stimulation.

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1813.a07.html>



Thanks again John! Another 'cheque' is in the mail.

US - If It Looks and Smells Orwellian.....

New drug legislation is about to be introduced in the US Congress by one of its staunchest anti-drug warriors Rep. Mark Souder. The "Drug Sentencing Reform Act" would:

- expand the purview of the Feeney Agreement, which restricts federal judges ability to reduce sentences, to include drug offenses;
- mandate random drug testing for almost all federal parolees and probationers, not just drug offenders or people suspected of having substance abuse problems;
- direct the US Sentencing Commission to no longer allow lower sentences for nonviolent drug offenders who have certain mitigating circumstances (e.g., drug addiction) or those who lack previous criminal records; and
- create harsh new penalties for growing high potency cannabis.

Criticized heavily by Bill Piper, legislative director at Drug Policy Alliance (<http://www.drugpolicy.org>) in Washington, the bill is "all sentencing and no reform". It continues a trend of restricting judge's discretion with drug offenders and means, in simple terms, more people in prison for longer stays that the taxpayer is paying for. To test every single federal parolee or probationer will cost even more money. While state correctional departments are moving to reduce the number of returning parolees for "administrative violations" (such as failing a drug test), the federal government is moving in the opposite direction.

More dramatically, Souder's bill would penalize growers not just for the weight of the seized product but also for the potency. Three classes of pot would exist: 6 to 13% THC; 13 to 25% THC, and greater than 25% THC (what happens if it's less than 6% THC, like Health Canada's cannabis?). Under the Souder bill, a medical pot grower with 50 plants would face a 5 year minimum sentence and up to 40 years maximum.

Medical cannabis users want the strongest pot available so they need to use less for self-medication - this has always been the argument for potent cannabis. Ironically, the Souder bill will encourage people to grow less potent cannabis, resulting in patients smoking more to get the same dose. Steve Fox of the Marijuana Policy Project (<http://www.mpp.org>) said that "Souder should call this bill the Lung Disease Act of 2003". Chest X-ray anyone?

Source: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v03.n1809.a01.html>

The VICS is pleased to announce that our newsletters are also available at our website (<http://www.thevics.com>). The newsletters are written in a format (pdf) that allows for easy viewing and printing if you have the free program Adobe Acrobat Reader on your computer.

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AIDS Vancouver Island
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Hep-C Society of Canada
388-4311

BC Health Services
953-3547

Law Centre
388-4516

City of Victoria
Crisis and Info: 386-6323

Sacred Herb
106-561 Johnson, 384-0659
<http://www.sacredherb.com>

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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>

"The highest result of education is tolerance"

- Helen Keller