

## Medical Marijuana- An Option Available in Massachusetts

This is a topic too broad to be adequately discussed on this page. I have tried to highlight some basic aspects below, but if you would like to know more, I invite you to a **presentation in Easthampton by MEDWELL HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER out of Brockton, here on Thursday April 5<sup>th</sup> at 11am**. They will be able to more fully address your questions and can lead you through the process of getting registered with the state if you think you might benefit.

Our nation's view of the role of marijuana (cannabis) is complex and clearly changing. The fibers of this plant have for millennia provided the tough fiber we know as hemp. The flowers of two particular strains of cannabis also have psychoactive properties which has led to its stigmatization as being a dangerous substance and regulated at the federal level in the same category as heroin and other opioids. As a result, this has strongly limited that ability of researchers to thoroughly explore the long known, anecdotally recognized therapeutic aspects of this plant. Beginning with California in 1996, 46 states have enacted some sort of program legalizing cannabis products for personal medical use. (Massachusetts recently joined the list of the eight states which allow retail sales for adult "recreational" use, but we won't be considering the subsequent issues around that here.) As in all states, this medical use program is very strictly defined.

As stated, the research on the medical effectiveness of cannabis is limited, but state law identifies some 100 "debilitating medical conditions" that qualify an individual for a "license" to purchase at one of the sanctioned dispensaries, or to grow their own. (The relevance of this may be changing with the recreational referendum.) These conditions range from the mundane to the truly life threatening, but generally are related to pain control, digestive issues and nervous disorders. Likely, if you think you might benefit from exploring this option, you could qualify. You would need to be certified by a physician, invariably one who specializes in this process. Few mainstream physicians, including your PCP, will involve themselves in this exploration. In addition it is important to remember, given the federal prohibition, insurance funding is not available for the certification or for the purchase of cannabis products.

Like wine grapes, there are countless hybrids of marijuana. From a medical standpoint, they reflect some combination of the two active substances: THC, which is related to the psychoactive properties (the "high") but also might stimulate energy, alertness, appetite etc.; and CBD, which is associated more with pain control and relaxation. Production and distribution of these products is also tightly regulated. They come in a variety of consumable forms, including of course combustible (smoked), edibles of all types, transdermal patches etc. In the established medical market, each form must come in dose measured quantities, like any medicine. Discovering the effective use of these products is left to the inner scientist of each licensed patient. Staff at both the certification center and the dispensary offer suggestions and plenty of informative literature to get you started. It is also possible to have a caregiver certified by the state to assist in the purchase of cannabis products.

So why might you want to wade into this somewhat murky world of alternative treatment? Ultimately it is because you have explored the various options that mainstream medicine has provided you and found

that your symptoms are not well controlled. Should you wish to learn more about this option for current or future self-care, I am happy to discuss it further. I have assisted a few current residents through the process, and each now confirms that they have found the treatment beneficial. **And of course come to the presentation on April 5<sup>th</sup> in the Mt Tom room.**