

# Crowdsourcing Medicines Just Like Movies

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In an e-mail, *Denver Post* editor Greg Moore explains how marijuana medicines are evaluated for safety and effectiveness -- not by scientists, not by doctors, not by the Food and Drug Administration, but by social media.

The newspaper publishes a blog called The Cannabist. Staff writers review marijuana strains, list and describe 92 that are available in Colorado, and provide links for each to Leafly.com so browsers can find just the right strain to ease their symptoms or treat their conditions.

"What Leafly is doing is not all that different from, say, Rotten Tomatoes," Moore explains. *"In both cases, the market determines the value of its information and they both use the crowd to evaluate products."*

Rotten Tomatoes is a social media website whose members evaluate movies.

This was Moore's reply to physicians who had written him and The Cannabist editor Ricardo Baca to express their serious concerns about the paper's recommending marijuana strains to "treat" mental illnesses. These include:

- 88 marijuana strains to treat depression,
- 25 to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- 23 to treat bipolar disorder,
- 40 to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and
- even a few strains to treat cancer.

Where is the data to support these recommendations the doctors ask? They request that the editor release the following information about each strain on The Cannabist's website:

- its recommended dosage and duration,
- its THC and CBD content,
- whether it should be used with or without FDA-approved medications or behavioral treatments for the condition,
- what contraindications are known about the strain, and
- whether other physical or mental health issues should preclude certain people from using it.

The writers are professionals with extensive experience in mental health treatment, medicine, and public health. They warn that the blog's recommendations may delay people from seeking real, evidence-based treatment for serious, potentially life-threatening, mental illnesses and that the marijuana strains recommended may make those illnesses worse.

The letter was signed by Christian Thurstone, M.D., general, child and addiction psychiatrist; A. Eden Evins, M.D., M.P.H., associate professor of psychiatry, Harvard Medical School and director of the center for addiction medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital; and public health expert Bob Doyle, who chairs the Colorado SAM (Smart Approaches to Marijuana) Coalition. Mr. Doyle prepared a list of the marijuana strains The Cannabist says can treat mental illnesses which can be read [here](#).

If your doctor diagnoses you with an illness, he or she can write a prescription for a medicine you can fill at your pharmacy. Prescriptions and pharmacies - as opposed to recommendations and dispensaries - signal that the medicine has passed randomized, controlled trials and been approved by FDA. You know without having to think about it:

- that the medicine is free of contaminants,
- it has been tested in animals to make sure it is safe for human use,
- it has been tested in humans to ensure it will treat your illness effectively,
- what it contains and at what strengths,
- what dose to take and how long to take it,
- what side effects you might experience, and
- whether it is safe to use with other medicines you may be taking.

You have none of these guarantees with medical marijuana. But no worries. The crowd will take care of you just fine.