

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: Down The Rabbit Hole

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If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. -**Alice In Wonderland**

Why is it that all of the conversation nowadays on the subject of medical marijuana leaves me feeling like we have all fallen down the proverbial rabbit hole? Voices in the discussion, who would normally have been considered sensible and sane, are now being made to seem provincial, prudish, callous and even crazy. All the while, those who once were considered “a little crazy” in their views are being held up as open-minded, wise, sensible and compassionate. How have we, in so short a time, come to a point where the whole debate seems to be turned upside-down?

It seems to me this curious turn has come about by blowing a lot of smoke at the State Legislature and among Nevada voters. Unfortunately after tumbling down that rabbit hole, we have come to this strange place where nothing can be seen as what it is, and everything seems to be nonsense.

Here are just a few of the strange myths and misperceptions which have actually gotten traction on the subject of medical marijuana.

It's Just a Harmless Little Vice

The advocates of medical marijuana often are the same folks who downplay the effects of cannabis products; both on public health and on society as a whole. They would say, “Lighten up, man! It's not a big deal. It's just a modest vice, no different from alcohol or tobacco.” They would argue that marijuana's mild consequences affect only the person who takes it. Overall societal consequences are minimal.

Of course, the more savvy advocates among them would quickly change the subject and say that this really isn't about the free recreational use of marijuana. All that is irrelevant. Rather, it is about the rights of a small group of seriously ill people to derive some comfort or benefit from using marijuana as a medicine. No doubt, they would produce studies showing that marijuana has helped people through terminal illnesses or severe pain. They will cite other studies that show children prone to seizures deriving benefits from marijuana products. Some studies might even claim that the substance has curative powers against cancer or other terminal diseases.

Of course, it's hard to argue with this. Medical studies are a dime a dozen nowadays; and it seems you can find a study to prove any point you want to make. Still, I, for one, won't reject the idea that the marijuana plant may have important and valid medicinal uses. I believe that every plant is here on earth for an intended good purpose. So there may indeed be severe cases where marijuana is helpful in managing pain or bringing comfort to a suffering patient. I doubt anyone

would deny such a person the one treatment that might help, just because it happens to be marijuana.

On the other hand, I also know human nature all too well. Common sense dictates that there are always a lot of people out there trying to game the system. And I'd predict that a majority of medical marijuana cardholders will not be those extreme cases we are talking about. Rather they will be people willing to say whatever is necessary to have access to the substance. Let's face it, the use of medical marijuana will become much more widespread than just those few extreme and justifiable cases. It will undoubtedly have a way of spilling over its bounds onto people who have no medical need for it whatsoever.

And that kind of marijuana use is just what bothers most of the medical marijuana naysayers. That's because it comes at a huge cost to society. Marijuana has been shown to dull the senses, slow down productivity, degrade intelligence and disable employees in the workforce. It has also been shown to cause an increase in certain types of crimes in the neighborhoods and communities where it is present; including violent crimes. Marijuana does NOT only affect the one who takes it. It affects homes, families and schools. It affects children, spouses, neighbors and other innocent bystanders.

So don't let the proponents of medical marijuana downplay the real effects of this substance on the community. Make no mistake. This is not just a harmless little vice we are talking about. Marijuana use is a bad thing for communities, for the nation and for society as a whole.

The Myth Of Regulation

Of course, there is the argument that the full regulation of marijuana would be far better than the black market model of distribution we have now. This concept may have merit. But numerous problems with the state law, and careful observation of other states where marijuana has been legalized, seem to indicate that marijuana can't really be regulated in a meaningful way at this point by the states.

The fact that federal law prohibits the use of marijuana; medical or not; makes regulation by the states problematic to say the least. In the case of medical use, it requires the establishment of an alternative state distribution system outside of the standard FDA-regulated pharmacy distribution.

Coming up with a problem-free system for that is a tall order. Recently passed Nevada state law has tried to tackle it; but there are still a multitude of unintended loopholes and catch-22s that have come up.

Meanwhile, it comes as no surprise that medical marijuana has become an emerging big business opportunity in Nevada. And wherever there is a lot of money involved, there will also be those who will exploit the loopholes and catch-22s. That leads to plenty of unintended consequences.

Moapa Valley is on track to become a victim to at least one of these unintended consequences. One provision in the law allows registered marijuana cardholders to grow their own medical

supply if there is not a registered dispensary within 25 miles of their home. Of course, the local town advisory boards have wisely stood firm in saying ‘No!’ to marijuana dispensaries in these communities. Even if their answer had been ‘yes,’ it is doubtful whether a dispensary operator would choose to locate here due to such low demand and minimal profit potential.

So what does that mean? Well, without a licensed dispensary around, anyone with a doctor’s note can obtain a medical marijuana card allowing them to legally grow far more marijuana here in their local basement than they would ever use for medical purposes. And “Dr. Reefer” (of Las Vegas billboard fame) is reportedly giving those cards out to anyone who claims to have a headache.

So what happens when some of these urban cardholders find out (as they inevitably will) that there is a quiet little town nearby where they could legally cultivate an ongoing crop of marijuana with minimal regulation? What’s more, by selling the excess of said crop on the black market, they could easily add \$1,000 a month or more to their household income! Well, as Mesquite Mayor Al Litman said last week in a city council meeting, we are “bound to see some budding entrepreneurs moving into the community.” And they probably won’t be the type to join the Chamber of Commerce or flip pancakes at Rotary Club Breakfasts.

As the state law is now, this will change things for Moapa Valley, beginning early next year. The home-growers will move in and set up shop. And eventually all of those adverse effects of marijuana at-large in the community will begin to be felt here in these little towns.

The state law, as currently written, leaves no good option for towns like Moapa Valley and Moapa in combatting this catch-22. It is not a matter of choice whether we want marijuana in our community or not. We will have it.

Fortunately, there have been some recent efforts begun by local leaders to appeal to our State Legislators asking for changes to be enacted in the law at next year’s session. A few small revisions in the wording of the law could provide better options for small outlying communities in this matter. We applaud these efforts by town board members and other leaders; and we hope they will be successful.

The Elephant In The Room

Finally, we must address the concept that everyone sees, but no one wants to admit is there. Whether it’s advocates confess it or not, medical marijuana is just a brief sleight of hand to divert public attention away from the real goal which is the enactment of full recreational use.

With that being so obviously the case; and the whole medical marijuana discussion being a flim-flam sham leading up to it; the whole thing feels even more like we are falling down Alice’s rabbit hole into a strange world of nonsense.

Honestly! How is a sensible person supposed to engage in an intelligent conversation about the medical benefits of marijuana; and talk about how we will all be better off if it is regulated by government agencies; when we all know that we aren’t just talking about medical use at all. It’s

obvious that once a medical use distribution system is established, well regulated or not, it will be just one more little nibble of the mushroom before the conversation will have suddenly expanded into full recreational use right before our eyes. And that would be truly nothing short of madness.

At that point, the once sensible voices in the debate will exclaim, like Alice did in Lewis Carroll's classic story book, "But we don't want to go among mad people!"

To which marijuana proponents will respond as did the famous Hatter, "Oh, you can't help that, my dear. We're all mad here!"