**Dr. Ed Gogek commentary: Voters becoming wise to medical-marijuana ruse**

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California voters passed the country’s first medical-marijuana law in 1996, but many are having second thoughts. Last year, five California cities voted on initiatives to allow marijuana dispensaries, and all five voted no. Oregon also voted down dispensaries. These liberal West Coast states have seen medical marijuana up close, and learned it’s barely medical at all.

That shouldn’t surprise anyone. The idea that smoking pot is medicine didn’t come from doctors or groups representing the seriously ill. Neither the American Cancer Society nor the National Multiple Sclerosis Society supports it, and the American Medical Association and American Academy of Pediatrics strongly oppose it.

The idea to call marijuana *medicine* came from the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws and the Marijuana Policy Project. These two organizations are part of a national marijuana lobby that represents drug users, growers and sellers. They’re behind every medical-marijuana law in the country.

They advertise these laws with an impassioned plea to allow suffering, terminally ill people access to medicine. However, once these laws pass, most medical-marijuana patients claim pain, not serious illness. In Arizona, 90 percent get their marijuana for pain. In Colorado and Oregon, it’s 94 percent. Pain is every drug addict’s favorite complaint; it’s easy to fake and impossible to disprove.

Good doctors try to screen out drug abusers, but medical-marijuana laws are designed to circumvent good medical care. Most marijuana patients get their prescriptions from a few unethical doctors who see patients one time only and hand out marijuana recommendations to anyone.

Pot-smokers know who these doctors are, and they line their waiting rooms. Before Montana tightened its law, eight doctors wrote three-fourths of all the recommendations. In Arizona, 24 doctors did the same.

That’s why there’s a backlash. People feel hoodwinked. They voted for compassionate care, not drug abuse.

I’m a partisan Democrat who supports most liberal causes, but I’m also an addiction psychiatrist. I work with drug abusers. They’re amazing con artists who will say anything to get their drugs. And the marijuana lobby is no different.

For example, based on scant evidence, advocates claimed for years that marijuana could treat glaucoma. Today, ophthalmologists believe marijuana can damage the optic nerve and make glaucoma worse. The Glaucoma Foundation now warns patients not to use the drug, yet no marijuana advocate has ever apologized for handing out bad medical advice.

The pot lobby paints the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Food and Drug Administration as blue meanies, depriving people of needed medicine. But science consistently proves these agencies right. For every illness possibly helped by marijuana, there are safer and more effective medications already available. There aren’t thousands of people suffering because they can’t use pot; that’s a fiction the marijuana lobby invented.

In Arizona, they actually called their campaign “Stop Arresting Patients.” They wanted us to picture grannies in prison, doing their knitting surrounded by tattooed gang-bangers. But in a live debate, the Marijuana Policy Project lobbyist could not name even one genuine medical patient who’d been arrested solely for possession. That’s because there aren’t any. Medical-marijuana laws protect drug dealers and drug users, not the seriously ill.

Even worse, these laws hurt innocent people. An analysis of several studies, published in the *British Medical Journal*, found that drivers under the influence of marijuana had nearly twice as many serious and fatal car wrecks as nonusers. California, Colorado and Montana all documented increased traffic fatalities caused by drivers with marijuana components in their bloodstreams, coinciding with increased use of medical marijuana.

The biggest damage, however, is done to our kids. The National Survey of Drug Use and Health shows that teenage marijuana use is 30 percent higher in medical-marijuana states. Teens who smoke pot do worse in school, do worse in their adult careers and have twice the school drop-out rate of nonsmokers. No parent wants that.

Last, these laws cost states money. The marijuana lobby promises that taxes on pot will fill state coffers, but it’s just another deception. States with these laws pay out of their general funds to regulate marijuana, and for the increased health care, substance-abuse treatment and law enforcement needed any time an addictive drug becomes more available.

So don’t be taken in; medical marijuana is a ruse. It’s bad medicine that helps hardly anyone and has serious social and economic side effects for all.

*Dr. Ed Gogek is an addiction psychiatrist in Prescott, Ariz., and board member of Keep AZ Drug Free, a group that opposes legalization and medical-marijuana laws.*

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