Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence

Yesterday I was in my local drug store waiting in a line. In front of me was a nice display of CBD products and free literature – so being a research engineer – I picked up a copy to read. Then the head pharmacist startled me (first time a pharmacist has ever come out to talk to me from behind their tall counter) with “Isn’t it great!” Then came a pitch on marijuana products like CBD (legal in Virginia). His literature told all the benefits and positive claims - - 8 benefits from CBD and 5 benefits from THC. From a neighbor of mine that owns another drug store I know he also is very excited about the great profit coming in from new CBD products.

As the use of CBD oil is very new, there are still significant gaps in what we know about its effects. The most abundant constituent of the cannabis (marijuana) plant is THC, the second is CBD, and there are 83 more chemical substances (cannabinoids) found in the plant. THC is intoxicating; CBD cannot get you ”high”. CBD oil products contain only traces of THC. CBD is a controlled substance in Canada, but not in USA. THC is controlled in both countries.

Marijuana clearly has some disadvantages that should be known, plus many other areas that need more study. The National Academies have evidence that marijuana use creates:

1. Respiratory issues, (2) car crashes, (3) lagging academic and social achievements, (4) lower birth weights, and (5) risk of addiction (about 1 in 20 users are addicted).

In a recent article (Volume 48, Number 1 of Imprimis) by Alex Berenson, he points out that cannabis use is associated with a ten-fold increase in violence. But Alex also points out that an association is not proof that rising cannabis use has caused population-wide increases in psychosis or other mental illness. The most that can be now said is that they offer intriguing evidence of a link.

In summary, I want you to realize we can’t have the benefits without some costs. Alex concludes whether to use cannabis, or any drug, is a personal decision. Just be sure you are aware of the risks. Most cigarette smokers don’t die of lung cancer. Most people who drink and drive don’t have fatal accidents. Marijuana products are dangerously potent and sold without sufficient warnings.

Pat’s family practice M.D. says that THC (marijuana) has some narrow benefits - - if nothing else will work for conditions like nausea from terminal cancer -- but her bottom line is “Marijuana makes you stupid.”

Alex Berenson is a graduate of Yale University with degrees in history and economics. He began his career in journalism in 1944 as a business reporter for the *Denver Post*, joined the financial news website TheStreet.com in 1966, and worked as an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* from 1999 to 2010, during which time he also served two stints as an Iraq War correspondent. In 2006 he published *The Faithful Spy*, which won the 2007 Edgar Award for the best first novel from the Mysteries Writers of America. He has published ten additional novels and two nonfiction books, *The Number: How the Drive for Quarterly Earnings Corrupted Wall Street and Corporate America* and *Tell Your Children: The truth about Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence.*