

VICS Newsletter



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News and information on medical cannabis

Medical Cannabis News:

Canada- Health Canada Approves Sativex for MS

A new cannabis-based drug has been approved for prescription sale to relieve nerve pain in people with multiple sclerosis, Health Canada said April 19. By doing so, Health Canada is also saying that cannabis is safe and has medicinal value, a major kick in the pants to opponents of medical cannabis, especially in the US, and a major step forward with respect to acceptance and recognition of the value of the plant.

Canada is the first country to approve its use, although more clinical trials are required to confirm the effectiveness of the drug. Sativex is a metered spray, administered under the tongue or inside the cheek.

Produced by GW Pharmaceuticals in the UK, Sativex brings the medical-cannabis debate full circle. Although the technology has advanced in 70 years, this product is a direct descendant of the cannabis extracts and tinctures that were a standard part of the medical armamentarium until the late 1930s - universally recognized as safe and effective for certain conditions and still being used today by medical cannabis groups. These products were taken away from patients and doctors as a result of the prohibition of marijuana that began in 1937, despite public opposition by, for example, the American Medical Association. Unlike Marinol or Nabilone which are synthesized and contain only one active component (either THC or a cannabinoid), Sativex is a whole-plant extract, containing the rich variety of naturally occurring compounds, called cannabinoids, that are unique to cannabis. The plant also contains trace elements of other compounds, which scientists believe contribute to its therapeutic value.

Source: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Apr. 19, 2005, www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v05/n641/a03.html

Mistake Results in Loss of Medical Cannabis

Bob LeDuc of Guelph may have to face the next three months without his legal medical cannabis because of an administrative error in Health Canada's database. It will mean days full of violent epileptic seizures, memory loss, irritable bowel syndrome and painful dry skin caused by cirrhosis, he said.

LeDuc, 55, is authorized by Health Canada through the Office of Cannabis Medical Access (OCMA) to grow up to 39 marijuana plants to curb the symptoms of his many illnesses. But the Guelph man lost his entire crop of marijuana April 13 after police raided his friend Marco Renda's home and seized 31 plants LeDuc had growing there.

Renda is also authorized to grow cannabis for medical purposes with a limit of 78 plants. When police raided Renda's home after receiving information from the Canada Border and Security Agency connecting Renda to packages of marijuana being mailed to addresses in the United States and the United Kingdom, they found 109 plants, 31 plants over Renda's limit. When discovered that the address on LeDuc's exemption card and Health Canada's database did not match Renda's, LeDuc's plants were destroyed.

LeDuc blames Health Canada for the mishap because he said they put his Guelph residence on his exemption card as the place where his cannabis was being grown and not Renda's address. "I have been growing my marijuana at his house since 2001 and every year it has been his address on my exemption card except for this year," LeDuc said. "I called Health Canada three times to change it, but they never did and I eventually gave up. I thought it must not be a big deal. Now this has happened."

Health Canada spokesman Paul Duchesne refused to comment on LeDuc's specific case for privacy reasons.

Without his own supply, LeDuc said he may be forced to buy cannabis off the street, which comes with both financial and health costs.

Last time LeDuc bought marijuana off the streets

it was mouldy and he suffered months of infections in his chest.

Source: Guelph Mercury Apr.16, 2005
www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v05/n642/a07.html

Netherlands: Medical Cannabis Sales May Cease

Health Minister Han Hoogervorst is considering abandoning the legal sale of medicinal cannabis in pharmacies and closing the Office of Medicinal Cannabis. Questions were related to the status of the program, which started to sell cannabis in pharmacies in September 2003 and lost 400,000 Euros in 2004 (~\$650,000 CAD). Hoogervorst said that in times of budget cutbacks, such a project was destined to be stopped. He also noted that doctors were not very positive about prescribing cannabis to patients and that patients prefer to buy it from coffee-shops.

Hoogervorst also claimed that the medicinal properties of cannabis have never been proven and that the use of cannabis may cause side-effects such as psychoses. But the Office of Medicinal Cannabis asserted that patients do benefit from cannabis and psychoses occur only rarely. The PvdA (Partij van de Arbeid, Labour Party) called on the minister to put more energy into the success of the program.

Sources: expatica.com, Mar.18, 2005; De Volkskrant, Mar.18 2005; NRC Handelsblad Mar.18, 2005



Science: Brain tumours

Massive increased levels of endocannabinoids were found in the tissue of two brain tumours (glioblastoma and meningioma) compared with human healthy brain tissue. The researchers concluded that the enhanced level of endocannabinoids "detected in the two types of tumour tissue may possibly act as endogenous anti-tumour mediators by stimulation of both cannabinoid and non-cannabinoid receptor-mediated mechanisms."

Source: Petersen G, et al. *J Neurochem* 2005;93(2):299-309

Science: Glaucoma

Italian researchers found that the concentrations of endocannabinoids in the ciliary body of the eyes of glaucoma patients are lower than in eyes of healthy people. The findings suggest that these endogenous cannabinoids may have a role in this disease, particularly with respect to regulation of intraocular pressure.

Source: Chen J, et al. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun* 2005;330(4):1062-7

Science: Synergistic effects in pain

Australian researchers investigated possible synergistic and additive effects of a cannabinoid (CP55,940), morphine and dexmedetomidine in acute pain models in mice. Synergistic (more than additive) interactions were observed between the cannabinoid and dexmedetomidine in the hot plate test, and between the cannabinoid and morphine in the hot plate test and the tail flick test.

Source: Tham SM, et al. *Br J Pharmacol* 2005;144(6):875-84.

Science: Schizophrenia

Hawaiian researchers investigated the question whether the onset of schizotypal symptoms in regular cannabis users preceded the onset of cannabis use or whether these symptoms followed cannabis use. Their study in a large sample of college students (N=189) found that these symptoms generally were present before the start of cannabis use, an observation that does not support the theses of a causal link between cannabis use and schizophrenia.

Source: Schiffman J, et al. *Psychiatry Res* 2005;134(1):37-42

AIDS Focus Group in Victoria:

Lynne Belle-Isle of the Canadian AIDS Society is coming to Victoria and wants to meet people living with HIV/AIDS as part of a focus group on medical cannabis.

The focus group is part of a project called "Cannabis as Therapy: Access and Regulation Issues for People Living with HIV/AIDS".

The Canadian AIDS Society has received funding from the Public Health Agency of Canada to look at legal, ethical and human rights issues for people living with the disease with regard to access to medical cannabis, and to its regulation.

Lynne hopes to speak with 12 people who currently use medical cannabis to help with their symptoms or who have used it in the past or who wish to access it and are having trouble accessing it. The results will be used to identify barriers that people face when they want access cannabis for medical purposes, to develop more informative educational documents, and to develop a plan of action to address barriers to access and the effects of the current regulatory environment on those who choose to utilize cannabis to help with their symptoms.

Lynne is planning to hold the focus group on May 24th depending upon people's availability. For those who are interested, please check with VICs staff as to the exact time and location.

THC slows development of atherosclerosis in animal study

THC protects arteries against harmful changes that lead to atherosclerosis, hardening of the arteries, researchers of the University of Geneva, Switzerland, found in a study with mice.

Atherosclerosis is the primary cause of stroke and heart disease. The study published in the journal *Nature* revealed that THC can block the process of inflammation, which is largely responsible for the changes in the vessels. Inflammation combines with fatty deposits to narrow the arteries.

The scientists studied a strain of mice that are susceptible to atherosclerosis. The animals were fed a high-cholesterol diet to make them develop atherosclerotic deposits. Adding THC to their diet caused the growth of the obstructions in their arteries to slow markedly after 11 months. The THC doses applied were comparatively low (1 mg/kg of body weight), too low to cause psychological effects in the mice. Lower and higher doses did not produce a protective effect. The effective dose would correspond to moderate doses in humans. However, it is currently unclear how the results translate to humans.

The protective effect were mediated by THC effects on the immune system. The Swiss researchers found that certain blood cells (lymphoid cells) of THC treated mice secreted less interferon-gamma, a molecule that promotes inflammation, and that migration of certain immune cells (macrophages) to the vessel wall was inhibited. In mice that also received a CB2 receptor antagonist, that blocked the effects of THC at this receptor, continued to develop atherosclerosis at a fast rate.

The CB2 receptor is mainly found on cells of the immune system.

The authors noted that "THC or cannabinoids with activity at the CB2 receptor may be valuable targets for treating atherosclerosis."

In several other diseases THC was shown to reduce inflammation by reducing pro-inflammatory mediators (cytokines), including interferon-gamma (IFN-gamma), tumour necrosis factor alpha (TNF-alpha) and several interleukins. THC reduced inflammation in several animal models, among them models of arthritis and multiple sclerosis.

Sources: Times Online, April 7, 2005. Associated Press, April 6, 2005. Steffens S, et al. *Nature* 2005;434(7034):782-6



BC Election and Referendum on May 17:

'Tis election time again in British Columbia, where politics usually resembles the theatre of the absurd. This time, though, in addition to electing our esteemed representatives of the provincial legislature who will undoubtedly look after the needs of her/his community, we will be asked to decide upon our voting system.

Offered up as an alternative to the existing system of one person/one vote (aka first-past-the-post), the proposed system is called the BC Single Transferable Vote (BC-STV) with the aim of making all votes count. The main feature of the system is that, rather than choosing one name from a list of candidates, voters number candidates from most favourite to least favourite. If a voter's favourite candidate is not elected, or has more votes than are needed to be elected, then the voter's vote is 'moved', or transferred, to her or his next most favourite candidate. It offers up a proportional system where the number of seats more closely matches the popular vote and fewer votes are wasted (an issue which exacerbates voter apathy with the existing system).

Many articles on the pros and cons of the BC-STV are presently in print and online; we urge voters to educate themselves. Visit www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public for more information on the BC-STV and its development by 160 BC citizens. And vote!

Repeat After Me, It's Only Hemp:

It's hemp, and now US organic strawberry farmer Vanessa Bogenholm would like to grow it as a profitable cover crop when her berries are not in season. She took her case to Sacramento, CA, on April 27 and tried to convince the Assembly's Agriculture Committee that nothing but fear and a lack of education stand behind the legalization of this controversial, yet misunderstood plant. Others might add that certain business interests have long maligned the plant to keep it out of the picture e.g. cotton, paper, food oils and products.

Unlike its genetic cousin Cannabis indica Lamarck, hemp (Cannabis sativa Linnaeus), which is grown for its seeds and fibers, contains only minuscule amounts of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Yet hemp, while it is legally sold in the U.S., cannot be grown there. American farmers see Canadian farmers growing hemp for economic profit, so Bogenholm feels that they should be able to grow as well.

Bogenholm said Republicans in committee seemed accepting of her idea, with the exception of Nicole Parra, a Republican assemblywoman who represents the 30th District in Bakersfield - an agriculturally heavy area akin to the Pajaro Valley.

Mary Gutierrez, Parra's spokeswoman, said in a telephone interview: "We just think that it would be sending the wrong message to children. Although we recognize that hemp is not marijuana, there are a lot of people who don't make that connection, and we think it's better to just leave this issue alone and move on to issues that are **more important.**" (emphasis added)

Don't try telling Bogenholm and other Pajaro Valley farmers that it's not an issue. [or those that see hemp as the soybean of the future, or as a more sustainable resource for our needs]

"If we can grow it as a cover crop and then turn around and sell it as an industrial use, then I don't see why not," said Edward Ortega, a long-time Watsonville strawberry farmer.

The only person to voice objection in Sacramento, next to Parra, was a man who feared that if hemp was allowed in the fields, then the plant might cross-pollinate with his legally grown marijuana, reducing the strength of its THC, Bogenholm said.

The proposed legislation is to be taken up again for consideration in January 2006, according to the office of Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco.

Nikos A. Leverenz of the Drug Policy Alliance Network, a non-profit drug policy reform group in Sacramento, has entered the fray. And he's all for the proposed law.

"The uphill battle against legalizing hemp is ... unfortunate and illogical," said Leverenz, the group's executive director. "The use of hemp is legion, and farmers in Canada are making money off it, not in the United States. But it's because of the political powers to be."

Source: Santa Cruz Sentinel, Sun, May 1, 2005
<http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v05/n709/a08.html>

New Vancouver Island Compassion Club:

Mark Russell is behind the Mid-Island Compassion Club, an organization created to allow cancer patients, AIDS patients and others facing chronic pain and illness to purchase quality cannabis to help their condition. Russell says he is strict in his requirement that people prove they have a need for the herb, demanding paperwork or other clear evidence.

For more information about the Mid-Island Compassion Club, call Mark Russell at 250-954-0363.

Find us online at <http://www.thevics.com>

THC and Cannabis Increase Food Intake in HIV+

Researchers at the Columbia University in New York investigated the effects of 10, 20, and 30 mg of oral THC and cannabis cigarettes of different potencies (1.8, 2.8, and 3.9 percent THC) on food intake in two groups of HIV positive cannabis smokers in eight 7-hour sessions. One group consisted of 15 subjects with significant loss of muscle mass and the other of 15 subjects without loss of muscle mass.



The three different cannabis cigarettes and the two lower THC doses (10 and 20 mg) were well tolerated with few physical symptoms and significant increases in ratings of "good drug effect", while the highest dose of THC (30 mg) caused significant side effects in some participants. Both THC and cannabis increased caloric intake in the group with weight loss but not in the control group. The effects on cognitive performance were minor.

Authors conclude that "for experienced marijuana smokers with clinically significant muscle mass loss, both dronabinol (at acute doses at least four to eight times the current recommendation) and marijuana produce substantial and comparable increases in food intake without producing adverse effects."

Source: Haney M, et al. Dronabinol and marijuana in HIV+ marijuana smokers: acute effects on caloric intake and mood. Psychopharmacology 2005 Mar. 19

Ecstasy and Cannabis:

British researchers reported that users of ecstasy who did not use cannabis were more aggressive and complained of more somatic symptoms compared with ecstasy users who were smoking cannabis on a monthly or weekly basis. Heavy cannabis use in the past was associated with more paranoid symptoms.

The scientists concluded that "moderate cannabis use may help to ameliorate or mask MDMA-induced aggressivity and somatic symptoms. However, this study confirms that heavy cannabis and ecstasy use is associated with several psychobiological problems, which may emerge after a period of abstinence from both drugs."

Source: Milani RM, et al. Hum Psychopharmacol. 2005 Apr. 7

Definitions:

egotism *n.* too frequent use of 'I' and 'me'; practice of talking about oneself; self-conceit; selfishness; hence egot-IST. [from EGO + -ISM, with intrusive -t-]
(The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th. ed., 1983)

ground tissue *n.* (Botany) all tissues (in plant) except the epidermis (or periderm) and the vascular tissues; e.g. those of the cortex and pith.
(The Penguin Dictionary of Biology, 10th. ed., 2000)

herb *n.* plant of which the stem is not woody or persistent and which dies down to ground after flowering; plant of which leaves etc. are used for food, medicine, scent, flavour, etc.
[Middle English, from Old French erbe from Latin herba grass, green crops, herb]
(The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th. ed., 1983)

invective *n.* violent attack in words; abusive oratory. [Middle English from Old French from Late Latin *invectivus* a., *invectiva* (*oratio*) as *n.*]
(ibid)

Substance Abuse Persists, Alcohol Most Harmful:

Despite the high profile debate over the use of cannabis, substance abuse of all kinds - especially alcohol - continues to be a major cause of disease and injury in the country, the results of a national survey suggest.

Sponsored by Health Canada, the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, the survey looked at Canadians age 15 or older. The telephone poll was conducted between Dec. 2003 and April 2004 and released Mar. 23, 2005. 13,909 respondents from all provinces participated.

Alcohol has the greatest impact since drinking is a major part of our culture, the researchers noted. Fully 79.3% of Canadians are alcohol users currently, while 92.8% have used it at some point in their life.

The researchers calculated that overall, 14.8% of Canadians found alcohol had a harmful effect on their physical health at some point during their lifetime. The lifetime rate was highest for residents of BC, at 18%. Alberta was second at 17.5%, and Saskatchewan was third at 16.5%.

The researchers provided a window into the aggressive and violent behaviour that alcohol can trigger in some users. Nationally, verbal abuse was the most common form of harm exhibited, with 15.8% of Canadians saying they had witnessed the behaviour in a drinker. As well, 15.5% said they had seen serious arguments that resulted from alcohol use. Pushing or shoving was observed by 10.8%. Finally, 3.2% of respondents said they had seen physical assaults that were fuelled by drink.

By way of comparison, 44.5% of Canadians currently have ever used cannabis, they found. Over the last 12 months, 14.1% admitted using the drug.

Source: Medical Post, Apr. 26, 2005, www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v05/n680/a03.html



2005 has been a rough year on our members and it is with further sadness that we report yet another loss. Tragically, Ron Ranger died in late April. As member #2, we've known Ron for many years - we'll miss him. PEACE

Krieger Heading to Supreme Court:

Calgary cannabis crusader Grant Krieger, challenging his conviction for possession of marijuana for the purpose of trafficking, is taking the case to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Krieger, 50, who suffers from multiple sclerosis and uses cannabis butter to ease the pain, lost a 2-1 split decision April 25 in the Alberta Court of Appeal. He had been convicted in December 2003 for possessing 29 cannabis plants.

Justices Jean Cote and Ellen Picard upheld the conviction because they felt even though Queen's Bench Justice Paul Chrumka erred in ordering the jury to convict (see VICS Newsletter Jan. 2004), they agreed with Crown prosecutor Jolaine Antonio that a new trial on that evidence would result in the same verdict. Chief Justice Catherine Fraser dissented, however, agreeing with defence lawyer John Hooker. Fraser said she would have ordered a new trial because it was not a curable error.

"The judge (Chrumka) had ordered the jury to find me guilty, with no other options," Krieger said outside court. "Justice Chrumka made a mistake and it was acknowledged by Justice Fraser." Krieger, who runs a compassion club and provides cannabis to others who use it for medicinal reasons, has always admitted the plants found in his Calgary house in 1999 were his.

Source: Calgary Herald, Apr. 26, 2005
<http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v05/n679/a10.html>

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DrugSense

<http://www.drugsense.org>

Canadians for Safe Access

<http://www.safeaccess.ca>

Canadian Cannabis Coalition

www.cannabiscoalition.ca

Canada Medical Marijuana

www.medicalmarijuana.ca

Media Awareness Project

<http://www.mapinc.org>

Action Committee of People with Disabilities

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Health Canada

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Norml Canada

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<http://www.cannabishealth.com>

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"No matter how big a nation is, it is no stronger that its weakest people, and as long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you might otherwise." -- Marian Anderson (U.S. contralto, 1897-1993)