



Newt Gingrich's Letter Supporting Medical Marijuana

The following letter by Rep. Newt Gingrich, former Speaker of the House, in support of medical access to marijuana originally appeared in the March 19, 1982 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

To the Editor,

The American Medical Association's Council on Scientific Affairs should be commended for its report, "Marijuana: Its Health Hazards and Therapeutic Potential" (1981;246:1823). Not only does the report outline evidence of marijuana's potential harms, but it distinguishes this concern from the legitimate issue of marijuana's important medical benefits. All too often the hysteria that attends public debate over marijuana's social abuse compromises a clear appreciation for this critical distinction.

Since 1978, 32 states have abandoned the federal prohibition to recognize legislatively marijuana's important medical properties. Federal law, however, continues to define marijuana as a drug "with no accepted medical use," and federal agencies continue to prohibit physician-patient access to marijuana. This outdated federal prohibition is corrupting the intent of the state laws and depriving thousands of glaucoma and cancer patients of the medical care promised them by their state legislatures.

On September 16, 1981, Representatives Stewart McKinney and I introduced legislation designed to end bureaucratic interference in the use of marijuana as a medicant.

We believe licensed physicians are competent to employ marijuana, and patients have a right to obtain marijuana legally, under medical supervision, from a regulated source. The medical prohibition does not prevent seriously ill patients from employing marijuana; it simply deprives them of medical supervision and denies them access to a regulated medical substance. Physicians are often forced to choose between their ethical responsibilities to the patient and their legal liabilities to federal bureaucrats.

Representative McKinney and I hope the Council will take a close and careful look at this issue. Federal policies do not reflect a factual or balanced assessment of marijuana's use as a medicant. The Council, by thoroughly investigating the available materials, might well discover that its own assessment of marijuana's therapeutic value has, in the past, been more than slightly shaded by federal policies that are less than neutral.

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