

## **Institute of Medicine Report Endorsing Medical Marijuana**

### **Marijuana and Health**

Report of a Study by a Committee of the Institute of Medicine  
Division of Health Sciences Policy  
(1982)

NOTICE: The project that is the subject of this report was approved by the Governing Board of the National Research Council, whose members are drawn from the Councils of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institutes of Medicine. The members of the committee chosen for this report were chosen for their special competences and with regard for appropriate balance. This report has been reviewed by a group other than the authors.

### **Chapter 7 - Therapeutic Potential and Medical Uses of Marijuana**

#### **Summary**

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Cannabis and its derivatives have shown promise in the treatment of a variety of disorders. The evidence is most impressive in glaucoma, where their mechanism of action appears to be different from the standard drugs; in asthma, where they approach isoproterenol in effectiveness; and in the nausea and vomiting of cancer chemotherapy, where they compare favorably with phenothiazines. Smaller trials have suggested cannabis might also be useful in seizures, spasticity, and other nervous system disorders. Effective doses usually produce psychotropic and cardiovascular effects and can be troublesome, particularly in older patients.

Although marijuana has not been shown unequivocally superior to any existing therapy for any of these conditions, several important aspects of its therapeutic potential should be appreciated. First, its mechanisms of action and its toxicity in several diseases are different from those of drugs now being used to treat those conditions; thus, combined use with other drugs might allow greater therapeutic efficacy without cumulative toxicity. Second, the differences in action suggest new approaches to understanding both the diseases and the drugs used to treat them. Last, there may be an opportunity to synthesize derivatives of marijuana that offer better therapeutic ratios than marijuana itself.

#### **Recommendations for Research**

The committee believes that the therapeutic potential of cannabis and its derivatives and synthetic analogues warrants further research along the lines described in this chapter. There also may be significant heuristic benefits to be derived from the study of the biological mechanisms by which these compounds act.

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Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

Some therapeutic promise seems to be offered by synthetic cannabinoid analogues. The committee recommends that particular attention be paid to the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in cancer patients because current management of this important and widespread problem is inadequate and studies suggest that cannabinoids may have some special advantage. Cannabinoids or their analogues may also find a place in the management of resistant glaucoma, of severe intractable asthma, and of certain forms of seizures that are resistant to standard therapy. Continued carefully contracted clinical trials in these areas seem worthwhile at this time, as do studies of the usefulness of cannabinoids in the usefulness of muscle spasticity.