

Don't Worry, Be Happy

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Medical marijuana is in the news. Referendums have passed in a few states making it legal (under specific stipulations) to grow, dispense and use cannabis for medical purposes. Conditions ranging from chronic pain and glaucoma, to existential angst and stubbed toes, can now be treated with reefer. Even "reefer madness" can now be treated with reefer. But the libertarian sentiment that spawned this movement caught the politicians and bureaucrats off guard. Pot dispensaries in Los Angeles, for example, outnumber Starbucks. The Jan. 3 issue of *The Denver Post* noted that the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws now calls Denver "America's Cannabis Capital," where actual or pending licenses for dispensaries are more common than liquor stores.

Marijuana is big business and many are profiting. The profiteers include the owners, of course, and two states (California and Colorado) that reap sales taxes. Also, a few medical doctors who write the prescriptions are doing OK. They are well-paid for an exam lasting about 2 nanoseconds, if an exam or review of records is done at all. And then there are the patients, the most typical of which is a 26-year-old male with a backache or "dry skin."

There appears to be stiff competition among the cannabis shops. They are competitive even in searching for clever names or branding that will bring in business. I was reading some of the names in one of our city's "hip" magazines. There must have been a hundred ads for businesses with names like Compassionate Bud, Cannamart, Sweet Leaf, and my favorite, Mr. Stinky's, who says, "If you got the pain, we've got the strain" (of marijuana, that is). You can't make this stuff up.

Then I came across an ad that stood right out. The clinic used terms like *alternative* and *wellness* in its ad, and sure enough, the clinic offered massage, acupuncture - and chiropractic. Let me get this straight. Chiropractic was founded as a drugless healing art. Yet here is chiropractic being practiced in a clinic designated to sell drugs. It just seems odd to me. So, why not have chiropractors in the pharmacy at Walgreens?

I called a chiropractor buddy of mine who I knew was still a child of the '60s. "Bobby, what's your take on this dope thing?" He had a strong opinion: "John, it's an herb, just like chili pepper or red clover! The plant should be legalized and we should forget about the medical marijuana angle."

I got his point, although if I remember correctly, and I might not, smoking marijuana has a bit different effect than other herbs. When I was in college, red clover tea never made me want to raid the refrigerator at 2 a.m. Eating a bowl of chili never prevented me from balancing my checkbook.

After a little more research on the topic, I actually found a pot dispensary owned by a chiropractor. "I was barely paying the bills," the doctor told me on the phone. "My partner moved out and I had this whole suite to fill, so I got into the medical marijuana business." He invited me over, and of course I had to see how this was working.

As I stood in the strip mall parking lot looking at the doctor's office, there were two signs. Over one door, a sign simply said "Chiropractor." Over a second door, a sign said "Cannabis Can-Do." The waiting room of the dispensary had menus listing the different varieties of marijuana and what

health conditions each strain of weed might treat most effectively. I learned from a brochure that the "Laughing Buddha" strain was said to be good for hot flashes and menstrual cramping. I noticed there was also a strain called "AK-47," used for post-traumatic stress disorder (?) A wall poster about a variety called "NY Diesel" showed a picture of a plant with buds as big as pineapples. I was afraid to ask more about its specific therapeutic pedigree.

I had imagined the doctor to be like Mr. Roach Clip from a Cheech and Chong movie. I had wondered if he would offer to adjust my neck and then offer me a brownie laced with "Maui Wowie." But he was careful to keep the chiropractic office completely separate from the dispensary. "We don't smoke in the office, or come to work stoned," he said. "But if I have a rough day, I may go home, shut off the phone, and light up. I suffer from chilblains sometimes."

I don't want to denigrate the use of cannabis for chronic pain, nausea, and other legitimate disorders shown to respond to it. Many of our families and patients seem to be doomed to use prescription opiates for the rest of their lives. We all deserve the best pain relief available, in the cheapest and safest possible form, including what we chiropractors do with our hands.

Despite the economy, our country remains productive - but that's because of coffee. Marijuana is more consistent with lying on the floor listening to Metallica at about 120 decibels. Will the U.S. continue to have productive financial advisors and fast-food workers if everyone is stoned?

I don't have many answers. What about psychedelic mushrooms or peyote? Are they legal? I don't even know. Is catnip really just a cruel, addictive herb used to make a cat less independent? And what about beer? Hey, now we're getting personal.

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