



To the Editor:

The answer to the headline question, *Is Marijuana A Medicine?* (January 18, 2010), is *no*. To characterize smoked marijuana as a medicine implies that it is safe. Smoke is neither safe nor effective as a delivery system for any medicine. Moreover, unlike approved medicines, there is no regulation of the manufacturing process, distribution chain, quality or purity of the product. In contrast, synthetic THC has been readily available for prescription by any physician since 1985.

The Personal Journal's front page graph estimates that 9% of those who use marijuana at least once become dependent. That puts the risk of marijuana dependence at the mid to low range compared to other illegal drugs. This estimate understates marijuana abuse and dependence in the United States. The federal government's 2008 National Survey on Drug Use and Health reports that 4.2 million people were classified as dependent on or abusing marijuana in the past year. Of the total number of individuals classified with illicit drug dependence or abuse, those with marijuana use accounted for 60.1%. This was more than all other illicit drug use combined. With 300,000 substance abuse treatment admissions in 2008, marijuana ranked ahead of any other drug including heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. Marijuana use is the major cause of substance abuse and dependence and the leading reason for admission to substance abuse treatment in the United States.

The FDA regulates and approves medicines as safe and effective. It is not compassionate to remove this protection from seriously ill patients. Legislation that allows the use of "medical marijuana" is a thinly disguised way to legalize the use of smoked marijuana by virtually anyone of any age. Smoked marijuana is not a medicine.

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