

Medical Cannabis Symposium

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Dispensaries sponsor seminar

For the Daily Journal

About 50 community members attended a recent seminar sponsored by Ukiah's three cannabis dispensaries: Compassionate Heart, MJ's Place and Reflections of Avalon, for an afternoon of presentations and discussion - the first of what sponsors hope will be many future events.

MediCann is the nation's largest provider of medical marijuana recommendations - more than 230,000 to date. MediCann founder Dr. Jean Tallerand presented the history of marijuana - discussing the etymological meaning of cannabis and its usage dating from Persia in 8000 B.C. to the present. "Cannabis is the oldest nonfood crop cultivated by humans," said Tallerand.

Citing research from Ukiah Daily Journal archives, Dr. Tallerand drew chuckles quoting a 1907 edition of the Ukiah Dispatch Democrat reporting that the "queer smokes gave one a desire to caress one's feet." A Garden Club report in a 1934 Redwood Journal article quoted a member who "gave a reading on marijuana, a most interesting and lovely plant."

Tallerand says "our dualistic history with cannabis" continues unabated, noting as a federally classified Schedule I drug, cannabis has no accepted medical use. "Yet drug companies developed a synthetic version of THC- marinol," said Tallerand, demonstrating the discontinuity between federal

regulations and the FDA's acceptance of synthesized cannabis as medicine.

Tim Blake, proprietor of Laytonville's Area 101 and founder of the

annual Emerald Cup outdoor cannabis competition discussed challenges for outdoor growers.

"Today we grow all the outdoor cannabis we need but can't get it to the marketplace. Mendo's crop was four times larger than last year, but we retain less than 18 percent of market share. We have a whole generation that doesn't like outdoor cannabis. It's a tough market to break," he noted.

Blake feels the future of the cannabis industry is producing strains high in "CBDs" - molecular compounds providing patients with more health and less "high." He emphasized his success with the 9.31 program and encouraged growers to join. "If you're not an inlaw, you're an outlaw," Blake cautioned.

Dr. Mark Rabe, MediCann's director of patient services, reviewed cannabis and patient health. "MediCann patient profiles include the elderly suffering from osteoporosis, hospice patients, glaucoma, chronic pain, insomnia, arthritis, migraines, cancer, HIV and MS," he said.

Rabe discussed the role of CBDs and the brain's endocannabinoid receptor sites. "Cannabis binds to these receptor sites located on cell membranes. This causes intracellular reactions resulting in relief from pain and nausea, lowering of intra-ocular pressure in glaucoma patients, changes in the gastrointestinal system and reduction of inflammation and blood pressure."

Ukiah's MediCann physician Dr. John Lovejoy discussed cannabis use during pregnancy and

breast feeding, citing four years of county public health statistics from 1,261 pregnant mothers.

"One out of five pregnant women used alcohol during pregnancy - with no safe levels determined," said Lovejoy, contrasting one out of 10 pregnant women claiming cannabis use during pregnancy.

"I agree with Public Health that mothers using cannabis must err on the side of caution, especially for children that have no choice. It's a very complex decision for doctors and patients," he concluded. "Cannabis is far safer than many pharmaceuticals, but questions remain on infant and newborn safety."

AnnaRae Grabstein, CEO of Oakland's Steep Hill Laboratories and cofounder Addison DeMoura presented their "Safe Cannabis" Program. "Products are lab tested for potency, pesticides and microbiological contaminants." Cannabis is then packaged in tamper-proof mylar bags sporting tracking numbers and nitrogen sealing. "Drug dealers don't give receipts or offer quality control," smiled Grabstein, stating the program developed in response to Mendocino County's 9.31 program. The lab has tested more than 14,000 samples to date.

Supervisor John McCowen discussed the 9.31 Medical Marijuana Cultivation Regulation. "The amendments providing exemptions to grow up to 99 plants have reduced grower anxiety. It's not perfect, but people no longer have to fear the sheriff. They visit your garden with a clipboard, not a machete. Last year a Task Force member made a phone call, was told the grower was one of ours, and the individual was let go," he noted.

Sergeant Randy Johnson, who volunteered to coordinate the county's 9.31 program, said many growers were hesitant to apply.

"Growers said, they want to get my name.' Like they

can't get it anyway," said Johnson, to a laughing audience.

"You may be legal in the program but there's no transportation exemption. That's still a risk," said Johnson. He and McCowen recently discussed the program with Sonoma County officials and District Attorney David Eyster. Humboldt and Trinity counties are also conferencing with McCowen.

"There's still lots of illegal stuff in the national forests. If you're growing there, I suggest you don't," said Johnson. "As far as mom and pop' gardens, anything that's 25 or less, we don't target. I'm not saying they're totally off limits. If you've got 50 pounds of processed and 10 guns, we might have issues," said Johnson, getting big laughs.

McCowen and Johnson suggested there may be additional ordinance changes, including enrollment opportunities for small-garden growers. Johnson noted four individuals spoke at Board of Supervisors meetings to support recent fee increases.

"You don't see that at Planning and Building," he quipped.

Johnson said only four people, including himself and Sheriff Tom Allman, have access to grower applications.

"The sheriff signs the permit. But if the Feds want records, I can pretty much assure you they're going to get them," he explained.

"Frankly," said Johnson, "the DEA has no interest in 99-plant gardens." But he has no illusions about the illegality of cannabis at the federal level. "If I do end up in prison, at least I'll have somebody I like for a roommate," said Johnson, bringing down the house.

"This is about trust, feedback and education. We're developing policy along the way," said Johnson. "I learn from you in order to change the program."

For information about the 9.31 program, visit www.mendocinosheriff.com.