



## **MARIJUANA ..... Lets Just Talk INSANITY!**

*By Roger Morgan, Exec Director, Coalition For A Drug-Free California*

California Governor Schwarzenegger opened Pandora's Box when he asked that we look at the experience of other countries to see if California should legalize marijuana to help fix the budget. He should have access to the best scientific evidence available which would obviate the need to even pose the question. However, to the extent he and those in his Administration who should counsel him on these matters don't know, we have compiled the following.

The evidence is consistent worldwide and compelling: **marijuana escalates the level of mental illness, crime and all related problems.** Pot caused mental illness when the THC content was less than 4%. **The average THC content today is 10.4%, but ranging as high as 37%.** Not good! The severity of the problem is related to potency as well as the age of onset, frequency of use and genetics.

Here is what happened in other countries.

- In the UK, under pressure from the pro-pot legalizers, the British Medical Association ignored predictions by psychiatrists and downgraded pot in 2004 to a Class C drug. By 2007 the Independent Newspaper, which had called for declassification, had the following headline: **“CANNABIS: AN APOLOGY.”** In 2006, 22,000 people were treated for cannabis addiction, over half under 18. Skunk, a highly potent form of cannabis with 12 to 18% THC, was now considered as damaging as cocaine and heroin, leading to mental health problems and psychosis for thousands of teenagers. People who smoked Skunk were seven times more likely to develop psychosis than those who use traditional cannabis, and the risk of developing psychosis much greater among frequent users and young people. The government has since reclassified cannabis to a class-B drug. (The Independent)
- In Australia, even 5 years ago, “.....national statistics were showing disturbing signs of new cases of psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia and further association with criminality. **Of 2,000 people facing criminal charges from 2001 to 2005, 75% used marijuana, and of the 75%, 60% had a mental illness.**” Recent studies of Aborigines have shown that in some remote communities, 70% smoke pot, with 90% of those claiming addiction. “We've seen acute psychosis that is irreversible, as well as depression and dependence. Suicide is linked not just to cannabis use, but to withdrawal. And a worrying trend, kids are starting to smoke as early as 10 years old. ([www.theaustralian.com](http://www.theaustralian.com))
- The French Government launched a media campaign in 2005 to inform young people about the detrimental effects of cannabis, including its links to mental illness. The potency of pot is roughly 30% greater now than then.
- In New Zealand, a 25 year study concluded there is a direct link between cannabis use and psychotic symptoms ..... and that the early onset of cannabis use, before age 15, constituted a stronger risk factor for psychosis than later adolescence. Cannabis use by age 15 to 18 predicted later schizophrenia symptoms. (NSW Health)

- Sweden assessed 50,087 18-20 year olds from 1970 to 1996 and concluded the risk for schizophrenia was increased, the extent depending on the dose. Those who used cannabis more than 50 times before the initial assessment were 6.7 times more likely to develop schizophrenia. The potency of marijuana today is 10 to 20 times what it was during those studies. In 2003 a Salvation Army Bridge Program reported that **90% of heroin users commenced illicit drug use with cannabis**. Sweden has a zero tolerance policy for drugs, and the lowest percentage drug use in Europe. (NSW Health)
- In the Netherlands according to the DEA, cannabis use by the age group 18-20 went from 15 % in 1984 to 44 percent in 1996, and heroin addiction tripled. The head of Holland's best-known drug abuse rehab center says, "...The strong form of marijuana that most young people smoke produces a chronically passive individual – someone who is lazy, who doesn't want to take initiatives, doesn't want to be active – the kid who prefers to lie in bed with a joint in the morning rather than getting up and doing something."

So, what is happening at home? In Sacramento County, according to the Sacramento Bee, budget cuts have already eliminated funding for about 50% of the non-profits and government facilities for mentally ill patients resulting in a 65% increase in emergency departments seeing psychiatric patients. "Many have just given up getting help (i.e. medications and treatment) and are out on the streets."

The correlation of marijuana and mental illness has been known for decades, but recent brain imaging research by UCLA helps explain why marijuana is a cause of the problem.. It seems that marijuana, particularly during adolescence, interrupts the white matter development in the brain ... even 28 days after abstinence; and lack of white matter is a major cause of schizophrenia.

The Pentagon shooter, John Patrick Bedell illustrates the problem. He came from a good family and was well educated, but after 20 years of smoking pot, starting at age 16, he was paranoid and schizophrenic. Seeking professional help, he went to one of California's infamous "pot-doc's" who provided him a "medical marijuana" ID card so he could access more of the substance that no doubt caused his disease to begin with. At age 36, in March 2010, he drove from California to the Pentagon and shot three guards before they shot and killed him.

Not all mentally ill people have snapped, like Bedell. But many are homeless, depressed and suicidal. They commit crimes and burden public health and welfare. They diminish worker performance and productivity, cause accidents, domestic violence, rape, murder, child abuse and create a threat to the health, safety and economic well being of society.

There is a movie called *Shades Of Gray*, the essence of which is that we are all crazy, its just a matter of degree. Based on my personal experience with addiction in my family for 30 years, a son and his friends who champion the cause of pot saying in essence "...it don't do no harm", all that I have studied, and the endless belligerent, self serving, "attack dog" blogs I have read, I think all pot smokers are some shade of gray. Its like a bell curve, with a few at the bottom who are relatively unaffected, a few at the top who have lost it, like Bedell. The bulk are in the middle, trending upward toward black. With increased use and potency, the problem will get worse.