



Americans for Safe Access

Activist Newsletter

Defending Patients' Access to Medical Marijuana

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Advocates Gather for National Conference

 Policy experts, doctors, patients, and other medical cannabis stakeholders are gathering in Washington, D.C. April 5-7, 2014 for ASA's second annual Unity Conference, "Navigating Medical Cannabis in the Mainstream."

"With medical marijuana moving more into the mainstream, patients and advocates are coming together to bring about meaningful change," said ASA Executive Director Steph Sherer. "This conference is not just for patients and advocates; it's for all stakeholders in the effort to establish medical cannabis as one of the public health issues of our time."

The opening day of the conference, Saturday, April 5th, will feature panels on the history of botanical medicines in the U.S., the future of regulation and product safety, an assessment of the different state medical marijuana laws and how they're working for patients, and the



myths and facts of cannabidiol, one of the plant's primary chemical compounds that works well for some patients with intractable seizure disorders. On Satur-

day evening, ASA will host an awards banquet honoring individuals and groups that have made extraordinary contributions to the advancing safe access.

On Sunday, April 6, ASA will hold a panel discussion on deepening our understanding of cannabis as a medicine, as well as several skills building workshops. On Monday, April 7, ASA will host an 11am press conference on the Capitol grounds, which will be followed by a briefing for Hill staff from Noon-1pm, and a lobby day to bring the issues of medical marijuana to Members of Congress.

Review of Epilepsy and Medical Cannabis Released

 The medical research group American Herbal Pharmacopoeia (AHP) last month issued a comprehensive review of the science and history behind using cannabis to treat epilepsy and seizure disorders. "Cannabis in the Treatment of Epilepsy" is part of the AHP's much larger *Therapeutic Compendium* of cannabis treatments that goes to press later this spring.

Its free pre-publication release into the public domain comes in response to the media attention and discussion of parents seeking out medical cannabis for their children with seizure disorders, including a statement last

month from the Epilepsy Foundation calling for increased access and research.

CNN correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta's follow-up documentary last month again focused on children with rare and severe seizure disorders that were not controlled by conventional medication but were alleviated by cannabis extracts rich in Cannabidiol (CBD), a cannabinoid with antispasmodic and other therapeutic effects but little psychoactivity.

In December, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved clinical trials on children with intractable epilepsy of Epidiolex®, a

M.D., who will be one of the featured speakers this weekend at Americans for Safe Access' National Unity Conference in Washington, D.C.

The letter of approval from HHS allows the study's backer, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), to purchase research cannabis from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). MAPS has been seeking access to research cannabis for over 22 years without success. The PTSD study received FDA approval long ago, but NIDA is the only legal source of research cannabis, and

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Maryland Lawmakers Pass Competing Cannabis Bills



The two houses of the Maryland legislature passed medical cannabis bills last month. The Maryland House of Delegates passed HB 881 first, but the Senate's SB 923 would create a more feasible program.

The Maryland Senate passed by a vote of 45-1 a bill that would authorize the Natalie M. LaPrade Medical Marijuana Commission to regulate the cultivation of cannabis and its distribution to patients through licensed "medical marijuana treatment centers."

Both the House and Senate bills would fix the flaw in the state's existing law that has prevented it from being implemented. Under it, the only way a patient could gain access to medical cannabis would be if an "Academic Medical Center" were able to distribute it, but none have been willing to jeopardize federal research funding to do so. The state's medical marijuana commission has issued draft regulations for the current law, and Governor Martin O'Malley indicated in January that he would sign legislation to fix the current law.

Alabama and Utah Each Enact CBD-only Bills

Utah and Alabama each enacted laws last month making allowance for limited medical use of CBD extracts of cannabis. Neither state law makes any provision for making or obtaining the medicine.

The Utah statute, HB105, known as "Charlee's Law" for a 6-year-old girl with a seizure disorder who died while waiting for it to pass, allows only oils containing 0.3% THC or less and at least 15% CBD. The Utah law makes such cannabis preparations legal, but not any other form of cannabis.

The Alabama law, SB 174, known as Carly's Law for a 3-year-old girl with a rare form of epilepsy called CDKL5, creates only an affirmative defense for patients and caregivers, and only patients with seizure disorders diagnosed by the University of Alabama-Birmingham's Department of Neurology are covered, and then only if they receive a prescription. Because CBD and other cannabis extracts are federally classified as Schedule I substances, no medical professional may legally write a pre-

PTSD Study Approved, Michigan Adds to Conditions

 A long-delayed study on using cannabis to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in veterans was approved by the federal Department of Health and Human Services last month, and health officials in Michigan added the condition to the list of those for which patients may qualify to register with the state's medical cannabis program.

The University of Arizona study will measure the efficacy of smoked and vaporized cannabis in treating symptoms of PTSD in 50 veterans. The study is to be conducted by Suzanne Sisley,

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ACTIVIST PROFILE: Melissa Fults, Arkansas



Melissa Fults got involved with medical cannabis activism as the result of seeing what her son went through after a car accident in 1999 when he was in high school. The injuries from

that crash required five neck surgeries and two for his back and left him with chronic pain. After 13 years of opiates and other medications—oxycodone, valium, centrex, Ambien and an anti-depressant—he had become what Melissa describes as a “zombie” who was vomiting blood daily. His doctor told him the medications were killing him.

When he discovered medical cannabis taken as capsules could let him reduce or eliminate other medications without the serious side effects, his life was transformed. After he was able to stop the heavy regimen of opiates thanks to cannabis, he was not only finished the high school diploma he couldn't complete but now has a full scholarship to a four year college, where he is pursuing a degree in psychology with plans to get a Ph.D.

But the Fults family lives in Arkansas, where any use of cannabis remains illegal, even for suffering patients such as Melissa's son. When Melissa heard a medical cannabis initiative had been submitted a few years ago, she and her husband knew they had to get involved.

“It's just a matter of saving my son,” she says. Their personal life is all about advocacy now.

The medical cannabis initiative of two years ago narrowly lost, but she and her husband are working hard to get another one on the ballot this year. They are traveling the state, holding educational meetings, gathering signatures, and talking to everyone they can about the importance of safe access.

“The advocacy work has been a huge, life-altering experience,” Melissa says. “I'm a walking encyclopedia on medical cannabis now.”

Arkansas advocates are focused on fundraising so they can hire signature gatherers to meet the July 7 deadline for submitting signatures. Melissa says they currently need about 55,000 more to make the ballot this fall, and that's more than the volunteer team can manage. To find out how to help, go to the campaign website for Arkansas for Compassionate Care at www.arcompassion.com.

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scription for them.

Utah lawmakers have expressed hope that CBD extracts such as that made by the Stanley brother's Realm of Caring in neighboring Colorado might be imported, but Colorado state law expressly forbids taking cannabis products out of state. The most recent guidelines from the US Department of Justice specify that any transport of cannabis products across state lines remains a federal enforcement priority for prosecution.

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they had refused to release any for the veterans. The PTSD study must still receive clearance from the Drug Enforcement Administration.

The difficulty in obtaining access to research cannabis has been true for a number of other FDA-approved studies, leading DEA Administrative Law Judge Mary Ann Bittner in 2011 to rule that an additional cultivation site license should be issued to Prof. Lyle Craker of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. That ruling was ignored, just like the 1988 administrative law ruling from Chief Judge Francis Young that said cannabis should be immediately rescheduled and made available for medical use.

The Veterans Health Administration estimates as much as 20 percent of those who served in Iraq or Afghanistan have PTSD, and more than 7 million Americans suffer from the condition.

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dose-controlled cannabis extract that is also primarily CBD.

Last month also saw legislators in Alabama and Utah pass laws that would ostensibly allow the legal use of CBD extracts, though neither contains provisions for obtaining or making the medicine.

“Releasing this section of the monograph into the public domain at this time provides clinicians, patients, and their caregivers with a single document that comprehensively summarizes the scientific knowledge to date regarding cannabis and epilepsy,” said Dr. Ben Whalley, Director of Research at the School of Pharmacy, University of Reading in the U.K., who co-authored the review.

The AHP's forthcoming *Therapeutic Compendium* is part two of its authoritative Cannabis Monograph, which adds cannabis to the herbal pharmacopeia of recognized botanical medicines. The first part of the monograph, *Cannabis Inflorescence: Standards of Identity, Analysis, and Quality Control*, set standards for quantifying the identity, purity, quality, and botanical properties of cannabis.

ACTION ALERT—Support HR 689 and HR 710

Contact your representative today with ASA's easy online tool and urge support for two federal bills that will end the federal conflict with state medical cannabis programs: HR 689 and HR 710.

The States' Medical Marijuana Patient Protections Act (HR 689) would move cannabis out of Schedule 1 of the Controlled Substances Act and allow for medical research to be controlled by an agency other than the National Institute of Drug Abuse. The Truth in Trials Act (HR 710) would allow anyone in compliance with state law who faces federal charges to offer evidence of the medical necessity for their use of cannabis.

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