California Conference Prepares Activists for Next Decade

The medical cannabis patients and activists attending ASA’s California State Conference, “Implementation = Victory: Preparing for the Next Ten Years,” not only had the opportunity to attend presentations and collaborative workshops on a variety of topics important to the patient community but also got to do an unexpected bit of hands-on strategizing and rapid-response training on the last day.

By all measures, the conference was a huge success. Over 150 patients, providers, attorneys, doctors and advocates, representing regions from around California, convened to strategize on state and local issues, starting with a reception on Friday, during which ASA gave awards to dozens of leaders of the medical cannabis movement. Attendees enjoyed dinner and celebrated the accomplishments of the past 10 years while dancing to the music of Norman A. Norman and Jah Fellowship.

Beginning on Saturday, ASA staff led collaborative trainings on strategic planning, media and messaging, action planning, and citizen lobbying. Regional groups from San Diego, Orange County, Inland Empire, Los Angeles, Central Valley, Bay Area, Northern California and Sacramento met together throughout the conference and developed new plans to implement locally. Representatives from each of these regions stepped forward to act as community liaisons for the groups and to continue organizing regionally.

At the Saturday luncheon, Dr. David Bearman, Chris Conrad, Dale Gieringer, and Joe Elford spoke about the last 10 years.

Supporters Make the Difference for Patient

On January 25th, the Washington Campaign for Safe Access, led by state coordinator Damon Agnos, and joined by medical marijuana activists from across Washington state packed a Skamania County courtroom to keep an ailing patient out of jail.

Sharon Tracy, a resident of Hayward, California, was facing sentencing after having been convicted of marijuana offenses, despite her doctor's recommendation. The problem was, Tracy's doctor practices medicine in California, not Washington, and Washington state courts had determined that made her ineligible for the protections of the medical marijuana law there, regardless of her medical condition.

Sharon Tracy suffers from, among other things, heart disease (her defibrillator has gone off three times in the last year), degenerating discs in her back, and chronic pain from eight abdominal/bowel surgeries.

Found guilty of felony possession and manufacture of marijuana, Tracy's conviction was upheld in a split decision at the State Supreme Court, and the case
years of medical cannabis in California and shared their visions for the next 10 years.

The opportunity to plan a specific response came on Saturday, due to a controversy over medication use at the Pickwick Center. The staff and managers there were fine with medication use at a smaller meeting ASA had there in December, and voiced no complaints on Friday night.

But the property owner showed up unexpectedly on Saturday, and apparently the general manager had not informed him that an agreement had been made about where patients could medicate outside. The owner then called Burbank Police. But the officers, after talking with ASA staff yesterday, the Orange County Register ran an editorial today arguing that the raids were "morally indistinguishable from an act of terrorism."

Four days later, ASA organizers were leading 500 protestors in a march from the federal building to LA City Hall, demanding an end to the DEA’s interference with patients.

Feeling the pressure, he changed Ms. Tracy’s sentence to home monitoring, remarking sarcastically that her many supporters could probably help her with the cost. They did that and more: before leaving the courtroom, those present had collected enough money to not only pay for her home monitoring, but also help with the appeals costs she owes the state.

Ms. Tracy said she was “overjoyed” at the result, and hopes her case will help spur the legislature to make necessary amendments to Washington’s law.

was sent back to Skamania County for a re-sentencing on January 25, where she was represented by court-appointed counsel, David Schultz, and Douglas Hiatt, a prominent attorney who has been representing patients in medical marijuana cases since 1996.

At the latest hearing, prosecutor Peter Banks asked Judge E. Thompson Reynolds to re-impose the original sentence, sixty days of jail time. Judge Reynolds -- who at Ms. Tracy’s original sentencing had remarked, "you’re not sick...you just want to be" -- was clearly not happy to see the dozens of activists who stood with Ms. Tracy as her case was called.

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