ASA’s 7th annual National Medical Cannabis Unity Conference, “The Price of Being a Medical Cannabis Patient,” brought over 300 patients and advocates to Washington, D.C. in March to hear the latest updates on medical cannabis and meet with members of Congress and their staff. ASA scheduled a total of 147 meetings with conference participants and Congressional offices.

Advocates lobbied for ASA’s new federal legislation, the “Medical Cannabis Control Act of 2019” (MCCA), which would create a new agency to provide oversight of medical cannabis. The text of the legislation is available in The Medical Cannabis Briefing Book, 116th Congress, which can be downloaded from ASA’s website.

At the start of the conference, ASA held two many people, but we are very excited to finally have created a pathway for Georgia patients to obtain their medical cannabis oil here at home and stop having to break laws by bringing medicine across state lines.”

The bill creates a Medical Cannabis Commission, testing standards and a distribution and production network for low-THC products. Georgia’s 8,400 registered patients will be able to purchase up to 20 fluid ounces of low-THC oil. The bill provides for research and calls for equity in licensing businesses.

The bill is now on the desk of Governor Brian Kemp, who helped broker the legislation.

FDA to Hold Public Hearing on CBD Rules

How CBD will be regulated federally will be decided largely by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). A public hearing next month will consider rules for how cannabidiol (CBD) will be integrated into consumer products such as foods and beverages. In addition to the hearing, the FDA is soliciting public comment. ASA is urging patient advocates to make their voices heard.

In announcing the public hearing, FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb issued a statement saying they intend to create “lawful pathways by which appropriate products containing cannabis or cannabis-derived compounds can be marketed.”

The FDA has sent recent warning letters about health claims to several companies marketing CBD-based products. Currently, federal law

free workshops, a veterans’ roundtable discussion moderated by veteran Todd Larkin from Pure Wellness CBD and Cannabis 101 with Dr. William Trout from Harvest Dispensaries. Conference panels addressed barriers to patients, global CBD developments including hemp, and advocacy in the courts.

ASA could not put this conference on without support from the community. A special thank you goes out to all who helped support it this year, especially all of the Unity Conference sponsors. With support from the conference sponsors, ASA’s scholarship program was able to bring patients from all over the country to DC to attend the conference. Anyone interested in sponsoring next year’s conference can contact Reenal@safeaccessnow.org to discuss sponsorship levels and benefits.

ASA Announces New Board of Directors

ASA’s new Board of Directors convened for the first time during ASA’s annual National Medical Cannabis Unity conference. The Board includes physicians, patients, researchers, industry professionals and a U.S. Air Force veteran.

The 2019 Board of Directors includes founding members, Steph Sherer, who serves as Board President, and Don Duncan, a Los Angeles-based consultant who is ASA’s former California Director. The other seven board members are:

Ben Bronfman, a founding member of Global Thermostat, an atmospheric carbon capture firm. He is co-founder of BIM a mobile payments start up and a founding partner at Dioscorides Global Holdings.

Nic Easley, the CEO and founder of 3C Cannabis Consulting, the world’s leading strategic cannabis consulting firm. 3C has helped clients across 30 U.S. states and 13

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Diana Dodson, recipient of this year’s ASA Courage Award, has demonstrated unyielding commitment to advocating for medical cannabis patients since before the first state law was passed. An early HIV/AIDS activist in San Francisco in the 1980s before the disease had a name, Diana was a Shanti counselor and worked with ACT-UP and pioneers such as Brownie Mary Rathbone to help get cannabis to people who needed it, including her brother, who died from AIDS in 1998.

Diana herself was diagnosed with AIDS in 1998, after contracting HIV from a blood product in 1985. Diana’s doctor first recommended cannabis for the nausea that came with taking her HIV medications, but Diana discovered that it also relieved her painful neuropathy.

The next year, she became a board member of California’s first patient collectives, the Women’s Alliance for Medical Marijuana (WAMM) in Santa Cruz, California. When the DEA raided the WAMM garden in 2002, Diana was operating the phone tree to get supporters on site, and she negotiated the release of WAMM leaders Valerie and Mike Corral after locking the garden’s gates on the federal agents. She remembers the day vividly.

“When I confronted the federal agents, they put the machine guns on me. I threw up. Then I spilled my bag of meds on purpose to stop them,” Diana recalls. “This garden takes care of people,’ I told them. ‘Do you know anyone with cancer?’ That got to some of them. One agent had a tear in his eye.”

That’s when the DEA ordered her to get on the other side of the property gate. Instead, she locked it on them, despite having guns pointed at her, and demanded to speak with the Corrals. Then she sat down on top of the sheriff’s car and smoked a joint.

Diana met ASA founder Steph Sherer after that raid. In the years since, she has participated in clinical trials with medical cannabis, including the 2002 neuropathy trial conducted by Donald Abrams. After that study was published in 2007, Diana took on an outspoken public role as a medical cannabis patient to get as much mileage out of it as possible, working with ASA and the Marijuana Policy Project. She developed a social media presence and contributed the patient perspective to blogs. She’s even cited in a DEA publication.

In recent years, Diana worked in Florida with United for Care to help pass Amendment 2, which created a robust medical cannabis program in the state. Diana was also a successful plaintiff against the state of Florida in a suit that established all patients can smoke cannabis as the medication delivery method of choice. She says her future activism will be around personal gardens.

“There have been times when I wonder if legalizing cannabis solely for medicinal purposes is the right thing when it should be part of our food and unregulated, but meeting the desperate need for patients to have safe access has always been my goal,” Diana says.

Currently, Diana is working on transforming a beachfront lodge in Costa Rica that’s only accessible by boat into a cannabis-friendly healing center.

**Pending Federal Bills**

On March 28, the first cannabis bill passed out of a committee in this congress. The House Financial Services Committee approved the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act of 2019, which would create protections for banks and other institutions that provide financial services to state cannabis businesses.

The SAFE Act is not the only pending federal legislation that would support safe access. A bipartisan bill to shield state-licensed medical cannabis businesses from federal interference, Strengthening the Tenth Amendment through Entrusting States (STATES) Act of 2019, was reintroduced in both the House and Senate last month. Other bills that would amend federal marijuana law to create exceptions for state medical cannabis programs include HR 493, the Sensible Enforcement of Cannabis Act; HR 1455, the Restraining Excessive Federal Enforcement & Regulations of Cannabis Act; and HR 2012, the Respect States’ and Citizens’ Rights Act.

Carla Rossotti Vázquez, MD, who is active with the Medical Cannabis Program in Puerto Rico. She is one of the founding members of Sociedad Puertorriqueña de Ciencia y Medicina Cannábica (Puerto Rican Society of Science and Cannabinoid Medicine) and Miembros de la Industria del Cannabis Medicinal (Members of the Medical Cannabis Industry).

Jayan Fazal-Karim, who serves as the Director of Alternative Investments at FK Group. He is also Managing Director at Think Green Consulting.

Pavel Kubů, MD, a founder of the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute and a founding member of International Medical Cannabis Patient Coalition. Olga Obie, MD, an emergency physician board-certified in Texas, California and Louisiana.

Nick Ventura, a co-founder of Venley, one of the largest apparel companies in the sports licensing space, securing 400+ exclusive sports apparel licenses from WME/IMG,CAA, and Learfield.