Opioid Crisis the Focus of 6th National Unity Conference

On May 24, ASA’s 6th annual conference started out with a screening of “The Life She Deserves” along with Q&A with Beth Collins and the documentary’s director, George Burroughs, and writer-producer John Hudak of the Brookings Institution.

Following the documentary screening, participants enjoyed a full day of plenaries on medical cannabis policy, product safety, education, research, and action to learn more about the opioid crisis. Moderated by ASA’s Director of Government Affairs David Mangone, “Intervention: How Government Can Save Lives” details how some government officials are working to break down barriers to opioid alternatives and end the epidemic. Panelists included New York Assembly Member Daniel O’Donnell; West Virginia State Senator Richard Ojeda; Deputy Virginia Candidate for U.S. Congress Kendra Fershee; Pennsylvania State Senator Daylin Leech; and Dr. Chanda Macias, Owner National Holistic Healing Center.

The second panel of the day was “Preventing Poison: Consumers’ Role in Quality Assurance.” Moderator Jahan Marcu, PhD, ASA’s Chief Science Officer and Director of the PFC program, led a discussion of the disparity between medical-grade cannabis and lower quality alternatives, as well as regulatory standards for product purity and safety. Panelists were Nic Easley, CEO of 3C Cannabis; Ezra Pryor, Heidolph North America Applied Market Specialist; Trish Flaster, Executive Director, Botanical Liaisons; and Jeff Raber, PhD, of The Werc Shop, an analytic laboratory.

Following lunch, ASA Associate Director, Debbie Churgai, led the panel “Connect Four: Educating Patients, Physicians, Providers, and Policy Makers,” which featured a discussion of how various stakeholder groups can spread the truth about medical cannabis. Panelists include Meredith Fisher-Corn MD, editor-in-chief of TheAnswerPage.com, one of the leading online medical education resources; Deb Kimless MD, medical director of ForwardGro, one of Maryland’s premier growers of medical cannabis; Sarah Laucks, director of education and events for Abilities Expo, which shows all over the country for the community of people with disabilities; and Debby Miran, a former commissioner of the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission.

The panel from the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (ICCI) in the Czech Republic focused on the global response to treating pain with cannabis. Moderated by ASA’s Chief Science Officer and Director of Government Affairs David Mangone, “From One Pill to the Next: How International Policy Makers Are Fighting the Opioid Crisis” featured keynote speaker Dr. Jahan Marcu, PhD, ASA’s Chief Science Officer and Director of Government Affairs, who moderated the panel with Jahan’s colleague, ASA’s Chief Science Officer and Director of Government Affairs, David Mangone.

In the afternoon, over 100 patients and advocates gathered in front of the Capitol for a press conference with elected officials to highlight the need for national legislation that would allow cannabis to be used as a tool for fighting the opioid crisis.

Speakers at the press conference included elected officials from both sides of the aisle, including Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz (FL-1), the chief sponsor of the Medical Cannabis Research Act, which would authorize research into the medical benefits of cannabis, and Democrat Rep. Steve Cohen (TN-9), cosponsor of the CARERS Act in the House of Representatives.

Also speaking were advocates such as veteran Patrick Seifert from Twenty2Many-Olympia and parent-caregiver Mark Zartler. Ethan Russo, Director of Research and Development for the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (ICCI) also spoke, as well as veteran NFL running back Mike James, currently a free agent. James is the first NFL player to request a “therapeutic use exemption” for medical cannabis, which was featured in a recent CNN documentary. Following the press conference, advocates fanned out to lobby elected officials and their staffers in scores of meetings arranged by ASA. Advocates urged lawmakers to pass federal legislation to remove barriers to safe access and research.

ASA Brings Citizen Lobbyists to Capitol Hill

ASA’s 6th Annual National Unity Conference began this year with citizen lobby day on May 23. Before heading to Capitol Hill on chartered buses, lobby day participants heard opening remarks from ASA Executive Director, Steph Sherer, a briefing on the “Opioid Crisis and Federal Policy,” and a workshop on the “ABC’s of Citizen Lobbying.” Participants also viewed an introduction video from Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D, Mass.), who told conference attendees that her state of Massachusetts provides an example of what “sensible and safe cannabis market can do to promote public health and safety.” She encouraged advocates to work for national legislation such as the bipartisan bill she introduced with Sen. Corey Booker (D-NJ) to protect those who participate in state programs from federal prosecution. “Thanks for being on the right side of history,” she said.

In the afternoon, over 100 patients and advocates gathered in front of the Capitol for a press conference with elected officials to highlight the need for national legislation that would allow cannabis to be used as a tool for fighting the opioid crisis.

Speakers at the press conference included elected officials from both sides of the aisle, including Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz (FL-1), the chief sponsor of the Medical Cannabis Research Act, which would authorize research into the medical benefits of cannabis, and Democrat Rep. Steve Cohen (TN-9), cosponsor of the CARERS Act in the House of Representatives.

Also speaking were advocates such as veteran Patrick Seifert from Twenty2Many-Olympia and parent-caregiver Mark Zartler. Ethan Russo, Director of Research and Development for the International Cannabis and Cannabinoids Institute (ICCI) also spoke, as well as veteran NFL running back Mike James, currently a free agent. James is the first NFL player to request a “therapeutic use exemption” for medical cannabis, which was featured in a recent CNN documentary. Following the press conference, advocates fanned out to lobby elected officials and their staffers in scores of meetings arranged by ASA. Advocates urged lawmakers to pass federal legislation to remove barriers to safe access and research.
Patient Advocate of the Year: Jennifer Collins, Virginia – Jenn’s remarkable story and advocacy were featured last month in the ASA Activist Newsletter and is recounted in “The Life She Deserves,” a short documentary from the Brookings Institution.

Elected Official of the Year: West Virginia State Senator Richard Ojeda, an Army Major (ret.) and combat veteran, led the effort on the West Virginia Medical Cannabis Act (SB386). His role in creating the state’s medical cannabis program was inspired by a desire to do something about the opioid crisis in his state. Currently a candidate for U.S. Congress (3rd District), Senator Ojeda has made access to medical cannabis a significant part of his policy platform.

Chapter, Affiliate, or Action Group of the Year: Together for Responsible Use and Cannabis Education (TRUCE). ASA groups and chapters work in states all across the country, but medical cannabis in Utah presents unique challenges due to the state’s politics and influence of the LDS church. TRUCE has made impressive advances despite that, playing a key role in the Utah Patients Coalition that has just qualified a strong medical cannabis voter initiative for the November ballot.

Researcher of the Year: Ryan Vandrey, PhD has done groundbreaking work on cannabis administration and dosing that will help provide a foundation for the development of new cannabis-based medicines. An Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Dr. Vandrey also recently conducted the first series of labeling studies for THC and CBD products, utilizing laboratories enrolled in the Patient Focused Certification program.

Medical Professional of the Year: Carlo Tornatore, MD. As Chair of the Department of Neurology and the Director of the Multiple Sclerosis Center at Georgetown University, Dr. Tornatore has made medical cannabis a priority for his patients. He includes use of medical cannabis in his patient education seminars and has brought it into the mainstream at the Georgetown Multiple Sclerosis and Neuroimmunology Center, one of the largest and most prestigious in the country.

Journalist of the Year: David Hodes has worked both as a contributor and editor of several business and cannabis publications including Cannabis Business Executive. His coverage of the intersection of federal policy with the cannabis industry is invaluable for both the industry and the public. He is member of the National Press Club.

Courage Award: Mark and Christy Zartler’s struggle to treat their daughter Zara’s severe autism, which produces self-injurious behaviors, with cannabis and keep their family together has been a very public one. Facing down the state of Texas to do what is right for your child defines bravery for medical cannabis advocates.

End Pain Not Lives Champion of the Year: U.S. Pain Foundation, which has been ASA’s partner on our End Pain Not Lives campaign since 2017. The U.S. Pain Foundation works to empower, educate, connect, and advocate for people living with chronic conditions that cause pain. Safe access to medical cannabis is one of the foundation’s legislative priorities.

Partner Advocate of the Year: Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe. Awarded to a partner organization or company that has displayed leadership and courage in their work on behalf of medical cannabis patients, the 2018 honor goes to Orrick, for its pro bono legal work on behalf of medical cannabis patients.

Utah Initiative Makes Ballot

Despite a challenge from opponents, a medical cannabis initiative has qualified in Utah. A campaign to get voters in Utah to remove their names from the initiative’s petition failed to attract the support needed.

The lieutenant governor, the state’s election chief, certified the signatures last month, ensuring it will be on the state’s November ballot. Officials say the Utah Patients Coalition submitted 153,894 valid signatures, about 40,000 more than needed.

Opponents had claimed that people were misled in signing the petition and mounted a campaign to get voters who had signed to revoke their support. Only 1,425 people submitted valid requests to remove their names.

A recent poll found that 72% of Utahans support the measure. Utah voters will decide on a program that would license cultivation and dispensary operations to serve qualifying patients. Those registered will be eligible to obtain edible and topical forms of cannabis and CBD oils that can be vaporized.

If passed, patient registry cards are to be available by March 2020, and cities will be required to allow state-licensed medical cannabis operations. Medical cannabis would be exempt from sales tax in Utah.

ACTION ALERT: Help Veterans Get Safe Access!

Veterans of military service have a disproportionately high rate of debilitating medical conditions that can be treated successfully with cannabis, including chronic pain, cancer, ALS, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, and phantom limb pain. Veterans deserve equal and safe access to medical cannabis, yet the Veterans Health Administration continues to prohibit its physicians from providing the required paperwork to enroll in state programs. New legislation would fix that. Tell your Member of Congress to support equal access for all veterans today! It’s easy. Just go to: https://safeaccess.us/Veterans-Access.

JOIN TODAY!

YES! Please accept my donation

(please check one) Monthly One-time $100 $50 $35 Other Amount $_________

Name_____________________________________
Address____________________________________
City, State, Zip______________________________
Phone________________________Signature:______________________
Email_____________________________________

Mail to: Americans for Safe Access, 1624 U Street NW Suite 200, Washington, D.C. 20009
www.AmericansForSafeAccess.org