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Issue: 'Marijuana's link with psychosis': Toxic Cannabis – health nightmare' (February 2011)

Dalgarno Response

“The science is finally in on the link between cannabis use and early onset psychosis. New Australian research has provided the first conclusive evidence that smoking cannabis hastens the appearance of psychotic illnesses by up to three years....The risks are especially high for young people whose brains are still developing.”¹

So were the opening lines of ABC Radios Tony Eastley's AM report on the latest Australian research into Cannabis and psychosis. The study was carried out on an incredibly large sample group and drew on research from scores of international studies.

However, will this report, one in a long line of scientific and 'evidence based' papers, actually be embraced or will it be swept away (as many others have) by the relentless and often unchecked rhetoric of the shameless pro-drug lobby and their spin 'doctors'? One of the most manipulative terms used in the pro-legalisation platform is 'evidence based science' and of course such 'science' is rarely geared to the detrimental social, familial or long term physical or mental health of individuals; no, it is aimed at trying to convince the understandably unaware public, that drug use and particularly cannabis use, isn't a problem. It is posited by such peddlers that only 'problematic drug use' that may be the problem and that 'science' is there to help us *manage* the problem, not **prevent** it.

These most recent findings are by no means new. In recent years Professor Jim van Os and his team at the Department of Psychiatry and Neuropsychology, South Limburg Mental Health Research and Teaching Network in the Netherlands in another significant study into cannabis and youth psychosis concluded the following...

“Cannabis use ... increases the risk of psychotic symptoms in young people but has a much stronger effect in those with evidence of predisposition for psychosis.”²

The publishing of on line in the last few days of findings from researchers at NSW Prince of Wales hospital concluded that, ***The results of meta-analysis provide evidence for a relationship between cannabis use and earlier onset of psychotic illness, and they support the hypothesis that cannabis use plays a causal role in the development of psychosis in some patients. The results suggest the need for renewed warnings about the potentially harmful effects of cannabis.***³

Yet again, this is not new, other previous and standing research as also found...

It has also been argued that 27% of the population carry a high risk genetic variant which produces a weaker Catechol-O-Methyl Transferase (COMT) enzyme which is responsible for the breakdown of dopamine in the brain...those cannabis users with weaker COMT enzyme are at 10 times greater risk of developing psychosis and, later in life, of developing schizophrenia...the greater the amount of cannabis consumed correlates to a higher degree of risk of psychosis⁴

The potential damage of this cannabis induced psychosis was no more apparent than in the recent Tucson massacre at the hands of Jared Lee Loughner. In a commentary from the Institute for Behaviour and Health titled ***Marijuana, Schizophrenia and Jared Loughner*** the following was revealed....

Overlooked by most commentators is Loughner's history of heavy marijuana and alcohol use... Loughner has a serious mental disorder, probably paranoid schizophrenia... One important message that must be heard amidst the chatter over this tragedy is that marijuana is not a harmless recreational drug. The sale and use of marijuana is often trivialized, or even glamorized. Marijuana use is neither trivial nor glamorous. Marijuana use is linked to addiction, to dropping out of high school, to lower educational attainment, to other substance use, and to mental illness. Marijuana use doubles the risk and hastens the onset of schizophrenia. Once schizophrenia emerges, marijuana use adversely impacts the course of the disease. Schizophrenics are about twice as likely to smoke marijuana as individuals without this mental disorder. Marijuana use not only makes the symptoms of this disease worse, but it reduces the effectiveness of treatments for schizophrenia. Marijuana use predicts an increase in the severity of psychotic symptoms.⁵

These evidences should be enough in and of themselves to renew efforts to diminish and not promote this pernicious substance, but this is only one of the health risks that Cannabis presents. What is important to note is that this illicit substance, touted as harmless to 'most' couldn't be further from that, and its impact is not restricted to mental health arena, but can and does inflict serious harm to users as the following outlines...

There is evidence of psychiatric, respiratory, cardiovascular, and bone toxicity associated with chronic cannabis use. Cannabis has now been implicated in the etiology of many major long-term psychiatric conditions including depression, anxiety, psychosis, bipolar disorder, and an amotivational state.

Respiratory conditions linked with cannabis include reduced lung density, lung cysts, and chronic bronchitis. Cannabis has been linked in a dose-dependent manner with elevated rates of myocardial infarction and cardiac arrhythmias. It is known to affect bone metabolism and also has teratogenic effects on the developing brain following perinatal exposure. Cannabis has been linked to cancers at eight sites, including children after in utero maternal exposure, and multiple molecular pathways to oncogenesis exist. Conclusion - Chronic cannabis use is associated with psychiatric, respiratory, cardiovascular, and bone effects. It also has oncogenic, teratogenic, and mutagenic effects all of which depend upon dose and duration of use.⁶

It is time that responsible and health conscious Australian's, particularly policy formulators and legislators take head to the scientific evidence that refutes the manipulative rhetoric of a few, if not malevolent, then staggeringly naïve activists; those who seek only to promote the 'rights' of a dysfunctional minority at the expense of the mental, social and physical health of an entire generation. **It's time to prevent, not promote!**

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Endnotes

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2011/s3132596.htm> 2/8/2011

² *Prospective cohort study of cannabis use, predisposition for psychosis, and psychotic symptoms in young people* Cécile Henquet, Lydia Krabbendam, Janneke Spauwen, Charles Kaplan, Roselind Lieb, Hans-Ulrich Wittchen, Jim van Os (Paper for *BMJ Online First* bmj.com)

³ *Cannabis Use and Earlier Onset of Psychosis A Systematic Meta-analysis* Matthew Large, BSc(Med), MBBS, FRANZCP; Swapnil Sharma, MBBS, FRANZCP; Michael T. Compton, MD, MPH; Tim Slade, PhD; Olav Nielssen, MBBS, MCrim, FRANZCP *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. Published online February 7, 2011. doi:10.1001/archgenpsychiatry.2011.5

⁴ *"Cannabis – suicide, schizophrenia and other ill effects: a research paper on the consequences of acute and chronic cannabis use."* Drug Free Australia March 2009

⁵ *Marijuana, Schizophrenia and Jared Loughner* - Commentary; Institute for Behaviour and Health (Jan 2011)

⁶ *Chronic toxicology of cannabis* Dr. ALBERT STUART REECE Medical School, University of Queensland, Highgate Hill, Brisbane, QLD, Australia - *Clinical Toxicology* (2009) 47, 517–524 Copyright © Informa UK, Ltd. ISSN: 1556-3650 print / 1556-9519 online DOI: 10.1080/15563650903074507 LCLT REVIEW Cannabis toxicology (taken from Introduction summary)

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