

SCLC Webinar – “Big Marijuana: Lessons from Big Tobacco”
Presented by Drs. Sharon Levy and Kimber Richter
February 19, 2015
Post Webinar – Questions and Answers

Question #1:

Part of the rapid rise of e-cigarettes is likely due to the tobacco industry expanding their share of the market and applying their old strategies to marketing new products. Is there any evidence that Big Tobacco and Big Marijuana might explicitly cooperate, overlap, or even merge?

Answer:

Dr. Levy: The tobacco industry is very well suited to produce marijuana cigarettes. I believe they are poised to do so, but these multi-national corporations will not likely proceed unless the Federal ban is dropped. I am not a business expert, but my guess is that for these multi-national corporations the risk is much too high for a product whose legal status is in a fuzzy gray zone.

Dr. Richter: I think they are - see: <http://mmjbusinessdaily.com/big-tobacco-has-a-history-of-interest-in-cannabis/>

Question #2:

Are there other states with ballot initiatives to move from medical marijuana to legalized marijuana?

Answer:

Dr. Levy: There are states slotted to have ballot initiatives on legalizing marijuana in the coming years. California is a big one - I believe in 2016.

Dr. Richter: Here's a rundown on what's coming up - <http://www.mpp.org/states/key-marijuana-policy-reform.html>

Question #3:

What are the long term effects of marijuana use on the heart and other organs, not just the brain, as you have mentioned?

Answer:

Dr. Levy: Smoking marijuana is associated with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, probably caused by the toxic products of combustion. Marijuana also contains many of the same carcinogens as tobacco, though the link with lung cancer has not, or not yet, been firmly established. There are cannabinoid receptors on many organ systems in the body. Excessive cannabinoid exposure reduces fertility, causes gynecomastia in adolescent males and impacts the immune system. The best defined effects of excessive, cannabinoid exposure is on the brain - marijuana use is associated with mental health disorders and decreases in IQ and poor functional outcomes.

Dr. Richter: I'll defer to Sharon on the content information. But I think we need to re-think what we mean by "just the brain". Some people think that tobacco "isn't as harmful" because it doesn't affect the brain the same way that other drugs do - in other words - people can keep working, living, being productive citizens when they have tobacco use disorder. The fact that marijuana has such a big

impact on the brain, and that, even stronger strains of marijuana and marijuana delivery systems are being introduced all the time, should be a big wake up call to us all.

Question #4:

Acetaldehyde occurs naturally in tobacco and seemed to make cigarettes more toxic and perhaps addictive? Does the same problem exist in marijuana?

Answer:

Dr. Levy: I do not know if acetaldehyde occurs naturally in marijuana. I would say, though, that whatever exists naturally in tobacco pales in comparison to what the industry added to it. We are already starting to see these manipulations to marijuana and that is a major concern.

Dr. Richter: I agree with Sharon here.