

Meeting Minutes of the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Special Advisory Workgroup December 9, 2021

Dr. Becker, Dora Radford, Dr. Matthew Christiansen, Jon Dower, Brian Gallagher, and Dr. James Berry

Opening:

The regular meeting of the Special Advisory Workgroup of the Governor's Council on Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment was called to order on Thursday, December 9, 2021 by Chairperson Berry. The meeting was conducted by Zoom conference.

Agenda Items

Introductions and welcome - Dr. James Berry

Dr. Berry gave the workgroup an overview of the purpose of forming the group.

Workgroup Charge - Brian Gallagher and Dr. Matthew Christiansen

This workgroup is expected to examine issues surrounding recreational marijuana specifically on risks for youth and pregnant women to provide guidance to the full council.

Overview of current marijuana policy landscape - Dr. Matthew Christiansen and Dr. James Berry

Dr. Christiansen discussed racial disparities in sentencing and the implications of penalties for marijuana possession. Studies have shown global increases in marijuana usage. In addition, studies have shown that teenagers could develop psychotic disorders from marijuana use. It had been estimated that the State could potentially collect \$45 million annually in taxes from recreational marijuana. In addition, Dr. Christiansen noted that objective and unbiased studies specific to West Virginia surrounding marijuana are difficult to find.

Dr. Berry discussed the psychopharmacology of the components of marijuana and their effects. Addiction was a concern, with the rate of addiction being around 9%. Dr. Berry emphasized the importance of messaging surrounding youth and marijuana use. In addition, the impact on those with other SUDs must be addressed. High potency THC had been seen to induce psychosis and contribute to the development of schizophrenia (notwithstanding genetic components). Other

studies had shown increased aggression and suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviors with THC usage. Dr. Berry also discussed the adverse health consequences of smoking cannabis. THC has been shown to have negative effects on the PPW population. It is secreted in breast milk and shown to increase the incidence of autism, pre-term labor, and low birth weight. Cannabis has also been shown to increase depression and mania in patients with Bipolar Disorder. It can also worsen PTSD symptoms. THC has also been linked to memory problems, loss of IQ points. It is associated with increased ER visits. Some patients present hyperemesis, i.e., repeated bouts of vomiting. There is also evidence of cannabis withdrawal.

Discussion was also had on:

- Positive indications in some studies for pediatric patients with specific types of seizures.
- Differences between THC and CBD.
- Higher doses of THC over longer lengths of time created more detrimental effects.
- Interactions between other substances/prescription drugs with THC.
- The Gateway concept.
- Cannabis exposure and opioid-sparing.
- The ceiling effect, prevalence rates of psychosis, frequency of occurrence, or risk.

Questions/research for future meetings:

- Need to look for comparison studies between criminality and its impact on social determinants of health as opposed to decriminalization and the outcomes of its usage.
- Studies on amotivational syndrome and cost of loss of productivity to the workforce, absenteeism, and presenteeism.

Expected Output - Dr. Matthew Christiansen

This workgroup will develop a document for the Governor's Council showing what the group's examination has found. Dr. Christiansen reinforced that although we come to this group with some bias or pre-conceptions around marijuana, we should keep an open mind and be available to change. It would be beneficial to look at vaping use and rates as well. The group discussed that it would be helpful to bring in speakers from all points of view to ensure that we accurately reflect the diversity of opinions on this complex issue.

Schedule and Calendar - Dr. Matthew Christiansen

The group will endeavor to have all members present at future meetings but must adjust around member absences due to time frame.

Development of agenda and speakers

Potential speakers - Keith Humphreys at Stanford, Ben Cort SAM, Colorado addiction psychiatrist Libby Stood, Center for Evidence Based Policy at Oregon, discuss with RAND.

Open Discussion

Jon Dower had concerns on diversion to youth and its impact. On the other hand there would be criminal implications and those would have impacts on vocational outlooks. Will patients

fall in the area of being considered for treatment (diversion). The group needs more data before making these conclusions. Mr. Dower leaned towards leaving the status quo. Dr. Becker was in the middle. His concerns centered around the concentration to which patients are exposed. He was also concerned about the methods of delivery. The group needs more solid medical information. He will remain open-minded but there is a complicated social equation that needs to be examined.

Dr. Christiansen felt the group needed to balance the pros and cons of prohibition and legalization. There are clear cons to prohibition for both individuals and society - including consequences of incarceration, having a criminal record, etc. For drugs with primarily individual health impacts we should fall back to individual liberty for consenting adults who know the risks (ex. tobacco). In the examples of hard drugs like heroin and meth - the use of the individual directly affects those around the user, which justifies the prohibition to limit harm to others. However, for cannabis, these societal harms are much less clear and less severe. Regarding cannabis, it is important to acknowledge there are clear health harms as well (as there are with tobacco and alcohol) and the council should emphasize opportunities to prevent further harm of addiction and mental health issues by limiting access for children and capping potency.

Brian Gallagher pointed out the policy failure of prohibition. On the other hand, continuing to decriminalize marijuana and make it legal for recreational use may not be a good thing for society.

Dr. Berry noted that greater access creates more problems. Marijuana isn't just a benign substance, but could possibly be descheduled.

Adjournment - 6:13 adjourned.