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The Director-General of Health

By email: medicinal_cannabis @health.govt.nz

WELLINGTON

SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED MEDICINAL CANNABIS LAW REFORM

Thank you for the opportunity to share my expertise and views on the ongoing medicinal cannabis law reform.

Introduction to my interest and expertise in medicinal cannabis

I have tertiary qualifications in law, (LLB(Hons), science (BSc (Microbiology & Biochemistry) and environmental management (RSHDipPHI). I have specialised in complex emerging medico-legal, environmental, resource allocation and public rights issues for over 20 years, working with and for an array of stakeholders including central and local government, tangata whenua, niche business, community interests and individuals.

I have defended numerous New Zealanders facing criminal charges for cultivating or using cannabis for medicinal purposes since 2012 when I represented Victoria Davies and assisted her to obtain a discharge without conviction from a charge of cultivating cannabis to assist her amputee and wheelchair bound husband manage phantom pains.

Since then I have defended and continue to defend numerous chronically ill and dying New Zealanders and many of the Green Fairies who have altruistically supported them.

I assisted Rose Renton draft and present her petition of 17635 signatures (Petition 2014/0083) seeking safe affordable access to medicinal cannabis presented to Parliament's Health Select Committee.

I have also advised many industrial hemp growers and prospective medicinal cannabis growers.

I have worked with multidisciplinary teams, undertaken considerable research and made numerous OIA requests to better understand the medical science (including biochemistry and physiology) and economic and policy influencers of cannabis medicine, law and policy.

I have appeared on several documentaries about medicinal cannabis, including Tory Catherwood's "Mum, Cannabis and Me" and as a specialist in Arik Reiss' Druglawed.

I have attended and presented on medicinal cannabis at numerous medical and public conferences and am frequently asked for media comment.

Be bold- create law that is fit for purpose and which reflects that “Food is thy medicine”

It is well understood that our health and wellbeing are heavily influenced by diet, lifestyle and environment. Some of the significant influencers of health and well-being are not well understood, and many interactions and relationships are complex. What is undisputed is that individuals are unique and different people will respond in different ways to the same treatment. The range of responses will typically plot according to the normal curve. An individual may respond differently to the same dose of the same medicine depending on mood, stress, hormonal influences, nutritional deficiencies and an array of other factors. These factors influence outcome whether or not we identify and understand them.

Cannabis and the many cannabinoids and terpenes which are found in the cannabis plant supplement the human endocannabinoid system, stabilising the nervous, autoimmune and other systems, promoting homeostasis. This explains how a single plant can assist with an array of disorders, and have different expression in different people. The “entourage effect” ie cumulative effect of the many cannabinoids and terpenes is important, as in combination they are typically more effective than when extracted into single isolates.

New Zealand needs much more than a pharmaceutical model

Cannabis is not well suited to a pharmaceutical model, as isolation and purification of individual components typically reduces their effectiveness.

I understand the medical and economic attraction of adopting a pharmaceutical model for the emerging New Zealand medicinal cannabis industry, and accept that it could offer a useful contribution for some doctors and patients.

It is however extremely concerning if an attempt is made to squeeze cannabis solely into a pharmaceutical model. Cannabis’s natural attributes means that: a) it does not naturally fit into a pharmaceutical model; and b) it would be a gross waste of its potential for the health and wellbeing of the public of New Zealand.

The risk profile of cannabis is very low compared to many approved pharmaceuticals. Cannabis has been used by many ancient civilisations for over 4000 years and was well accepted as a medicine of choice for a range of afflictions until early last century. The risk profile for cannabis is very favourable compared to most pharmaceutical products. The chance of a significant unexpected adverse effect is extremely low- and much lower than for synthetic products.

I accordingly invite and encourage you to step beyond the “safe” but limiting constraints of the pharmaceutical model and into a new paradigm, with the objective of developing a regime that optimises the wide-ranging benefits that cannabis can offer for community and environmental wellbeing.

This regime will likely have different grades of product for different purposes, including:

- a) pharmaceutical type products;
- b) dietary supplements;
- c) edibles;
- d) home grown.

This will assist to remove unjustified and unnecessary barriers to access and help make cannabis accessible and affordable. It will also assist with the transition of existing Green fairies and medicinal users into a lawful new regime.

You have an opportunity to create a new purpose designed model for an ancient herb, which will allow New Zealand to be a compassionate model for the world.

I have seen far too many struggling and ill New Zealanders who face criminal charges and life-long consequences from these, on top of their pre-existing challenges. It is unfair and contrary to international human rights to impose yet more burdens on these New Zealanders who are already struggling. It is time to move away from the old power and control model to create a “people-focused” solution.

I appreciate the time that has gone into developing your consultation paper. Unfortunately it is far too complex for many of our sickest (and busiest) citizens to meaningfully respond to.

On behalf of the many I represent, I invite you to focus on how best to ensure cannabis is safe, affordable and accessible, so sick people can use the herb of their choice without being dragged into the criminal justice system.

This will require policy advisors to take a big step away from the bureaucratic safety of rules and instead create a visionary solution that is “fit for purpose”.

I currently have a massive workload and am unable to provide more detailed response to your consultation process within the specified time frame.

I am however very happy for you to contact me with any queries and will assist further in any way I can.

Thank you for your community engagement.



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Principal