

October 9, 2007

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Kansas State Nurses Association Pass Medical Marijuana Resolution

Substitute declaration supports research, fails to advocate for safe access by patients

Topeka, KS – Delegates to the Kansas State Nurses' Association (KSNA) annual conference last Friday passed a last minute substitute resolution offered by the End of Life/Palliative Care Conference Group on the medical use of marijuana. That resolution, titled, *Marijuana Resolution*, states in part that the KSNA will "support research through controlled investigational trials on the chemical components of marijuana, their efficacy, associated toxicities, and alternative methods to smoked marijuana."

The original resolution, offered by KSNA Council on Practice and submitted by Executive Director Terri Roberts, titled *Providing Patients Safe Access to Therapeutic Marijuana/Cannabis* was withdrawn, and the alternate resolution submitted, before the group's annual business meeting.

The original declaration was identical to the 2003 American Nurses Association resolution on safe access to medical marijuana. That resolution would have called for, in part, "Support [for] the right of patients to have safe access to therapeutic marijuana/cannabis under appropriate prescriber supervision; and, Support [for] legislation to remove criminal penalties including arrest and imprisonment for bona fide patients and prescribers of therapeutic marijuana/cannabis." This language did not appear in the substitute resolution.

Fourteen state nurses' associations and the American Nurses Association support safe access to medical marijuana/cannabis. Dozens of medical organizations similarly support medical marijuana patients and doctors.

"We applaud the organization for advocating research on the medicinal properties of marijuana, which the federal government has obstructed for decades. Because the U.S. government will not provide an adequate supply of marijuana to researchers, calls for continued study have little chance of being heard until the DEA stop playing politics with science," said Laura A. Green, Director of the Kansas Compassionate Care Coalition, a statewide organization that advocates for a change in law to allow legal medical marijuana use in Kansas.

In a prepared statement, also issued Friday, Dr. Ellen Carson KSNA past-president wrote, "The membership has decided that while compassionate care of all individuals is essential to nursing, we are not taking a position on the use of medical marijuana, until more research is completed..."

"We are deeply disappointed for the legitimate medical marijuana patients and their families in Kansas that the KSNA has not called for safe access to therapeutic marijuana/cannabis," said Green. "The serious and terminally ill who use this medicine to relieve their suffering merit respect and understanding from the Kansas State Nurses Association through their resolution process."

Currently, the possession of any amount of marijuana in Kansas, for whatever purpose, is punishable by up to one year in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500. A second conviction is a felony and can result in 42 months in jail and a fine of up to \$100,000. Cultivation of five or more marijuana plants, even for medical purposes, is a felony punishable by 11 to 17 years in prison.

"Patients with debilitating health problems should have safe, legal access to cannabis and cannabis derivatives as prescribed by, or under the supervision of, licensed medical providers," said Dr. Jon Hauxwell in his remarks to the delegates in an issues forum at the KSNA meeting last week. "Sick people need alternatives and they shouldn't have to become criminals to invoke them."

Former Kansas Attorney General and Kansas Compassionate Care Coalition legal consultant, Robert T. Stephan, has asked Kansans to join him in calling on the legislature to pass a law protecting legitimate medical marijuana patients from arrest. "All Kansans have a moral and ethical responsibility to protect law-abiding citizens from the risk and trauma of arrest, prosecution, conviction and prison simply because they've attempted to gain relief from a serious physical condition," said Stephan.

"We have several hundred nurses in our coalition who believe in putting patients first on this issue," said Green. "It's a shame the original resolution was not put a vote by the membership. Without doubt, it would have overwhelmingly passed."

Kansas Compassionate Care Coalition members are in 90 Kansas communities, with chapters in Topeka, Wichita, Liberal, Hutchinson, Auburn, Johnson, Haysville, Johnson, Kansas City, Manhattan, and Leavenworth. The group includes concerned patients, doctors, nurses, caregivers and others. For more information, and the full text of the KSNA resolution and prepared statement, see the coalition's web site, www.ksgccc.org.

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