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New Organization Advocates Compassion for Medical Marijuana Patients in Kansas

Poll shows 62% of Kansans would not oppose a law protecting patients from arrest

A new, grassroots organization has been created in Kansas to advocate for legal protection of patients who use medical marijuana and for physicians who recommend the drug as part of a treatment program.

The group, known as the Kansas Compassionate Care Coalition, is committed to supporting those who use marijuana as a last resort when more traditional medications prove ineffective in addressing the effects of chronic pain, cancer, chemotherapy, AIDS, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, glaucoma and other serious conditions.

"Our objectives are simple: To allow physicians – not politicians – to make decisions about what is best for patients and to protect citizens from the risk of arrest simply because they're trying to gain relief from a major medical problem," said Coalition Director Laura Green.

A nationwide Gallup Poll conducted in 1999 found that 73 percent of American adults favor "making marijuana legally available for doctors to prescribe in order to reduce pain and suffering."

Twelve states that make up about 22 percent of the U.S. population already have enacted laws that allow the use of cannabis for medical purposes. An estimated 115,000 Americans have obtained physician recommendations to use marijuana for medical purposes in states with existing medical marijuana laws, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

In addition, a growing number of mainstream medical organizations have voiced support for the use of medical marijuana, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Public Health Association and the American Nurses Association. The *New England Journal of Medicine* also has editorialized in favor of patient access to marijuana.

"No one should face the ordeal of arrest and possibly prison because they want to feel better," Green said.

"That's why the Compassionate Care Coalition is working closely with state legislators, law enforcement officials, healthcare leaders and others to pass laws that will help our fellow Kansans in their time of need."

In Kansas, the possession of any amount of marijuana for whatever purpose currently is punishable by up to one year in jail and a fine of up to \$2,500. Cultivation of five or more marijuana plants, even for medical purposes, is a felony punishable by 11 to 17 years in prison.

Green said that common misconceptions about medical marijuana have been shown to be inaccurate. A 2002 study by the Government Accounting Office, for example, found no evidence that abuse of medical marijuana laws was routinely occurring in states that had passed medical marijuana legislation.

"We look forward to working with the growing number of Kansans who believe that our fellow residents have a right to access medical marijuana if it is recommended by their physician," Green said.

The Kansas Compassionate Care Coalition currently has more than 400 members. The group includes concerned patients, doctors, nurses, caregivers and others. For more information see the coalition web site, www.ksgccc.org.

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