



Why I chose to use cannabis

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I just learned that my ovarian cancer is back and that I need to start chemotherapy. At 5 feet, 7 inches, I weigh only 95 pounds, having lost 30 pounds since the surgery. I don't want to lose any more weight. And so I research options to help with appetite. All recommended products have side effects I don't like. The one exception is cannabis. I decide to ask my oncologist for a prescription.

Process

My oncologist is surprised and a little "tickled" at this request. Although I am the first patient ever to ask her for cannabis, she is keen to figure out how to make this work. She telephones the oncology pharmacy, and they don't know what to do. I am only the second patient to ask for cannabis at this large tertiary-care hospital. Wow!!

However, my oncologist investigates what to do in this situation and finds a hospital memo recommending that patients be referred to another physician in a different tertiary-care hospital. She gives me the referral, and I leave on my hunt for a prescription for medical marijuana.

While my oncologist is out of the room, my oncology nurse whispers that she has a patient who buys "stuff" at a certain establishment on a certain street. This operation seems hush-hush, leading me to believe the mentioned location is not a legal clinic. However, I'm very interested, because it could take a lot of time to get "stuff" from the legal clinic.

Now I have two leads and decide to follow up on both simultaneously, given that I start chemo in one week.

I'm able to buy a tincture from the illegal-but-tolerated-by-police-for-fifteen-years establishment. It takes one week. I have to submit documentation that proves my condition, and they do some sort of background check. Then I walk in and buy the "stuff."

On the other hand, it takes me almost 6 weeks to get "stuff" from a legal operation. First, I fax the referral to the physician at the other hospital. Then, I have a contact follow-up to ensure that the referral is being processed. The physician in question responds that he is confused about why my oncologist referred me, because he is not a cannabis clinic. Luckily, the physician empathizes with my situation and refers me to the cannabis clinic anyway.

I set up an appointment with the clinic, where I am seen by a physician who reviews the other options to help with my appetite. I explain that I don't want those options and would like a prescription for cannabis. I am then seen by an educator who understands the different types of marijuana and recommends one for my situation.

The educator registers me with a government-regulated producer. A few days later, the producer contacts me directly,

and I submit my order. I receive my "stuff" via courier in a few days. It includes a pamphlet from Health Canada stating that marijuana is not an approved therapeutic product. Boy, does this make it a grey area. I deliver the marijuana leaves to the clinic so that they can make a tincture from it. Finally, on week 6, I have my legally-acquired-but-not-quite-legal marijuana tincture.

Buying the "stuff" from a government-approved producer guarantees that there will be no pesticide or mold residue. In addition, the tincture is 20 times more potent than the illegal "stuff."

Reaction from Family and Friends

My husband felt very uncomfortable with the idea of my using marijuana. He initially discouraged me from getting it, saying that I was already eating more. (Not true.) Once we had the tincture in the house, he suggested that it was probably safer not to let people know that we had it in the house. This coming from a man who goes to bed without locking doors. Now, he is okay with the situation. But I had to overcome that initial reticence.

Over the last few weeks, I've told friends what I am doing to get my weight up. The reaction is mixed. Those who have used marijuana feel that it is a great idea. Those who haven't smoked, giggle, and they are very curious to know how it all works.

I reassure my friends that I don't get too high, if at all, and that I am able to dose the product to whet my appetite without ending up in la-la land. As they continue to ask questions and giggle away, I realize that they are looking at me in a whole new light—maybe even a wow, kinda-cool way.

A number of friends have remarked on how much better I look, even better than before the chemo. No small wonder, given that I eat more and sleep so much better.

Conclusion

When I next meet my oncologist, I intend to bring the documentation from the legal clinic, and I hope that she will be open to referring other patients. I also hope that she will consider offering this treatment to some of her patients.

From my perspective, cannabis has made a large impact on my quality of life. I am very happy I jumped through a bunch of hoops to get it.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

I have read and understood *Current Oncology's* policy on disclosing conflicts of interest, and I declare that I have none.

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