

## **Edu: Research Indicates Possible Benefits of Marijuana, Possible Penalty**

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With certain research indicating possible benefits of marijuana, many believe Illinois should be one of the next states to legalize it for medicinal purposes.

There are currently 11 states that allow doctors to prescribe the use of medical marijuana, however the protection for those patients isn't necessarily guaranteed. According to David Ostrow, director of Ostrow and Associates and founder of the Medical Marijuana Policy Advocacy Project, Federal law makes no distinction between those that use marijuana for medical purposes and those who do not. In other words, while it is legal to prescribe it, the government may not necessarily protect a patient while they are using it. Patients possessing marijuana can be sentenced up to a year in jail, while patients who are cultivating their own medical marijuana can be sentenced up to five years.

Gregory Halperin a doctor at the Gailey Eye Clinic said he believes the best application for medical marijuana would be in its use with the terminally ill and cancer patients in relieving pain. "Each of the different drugs and pain killers, both legal and not legal, act in different ways," Halperin said, "The advantage of a compound like THC is that it does not only affect the pain receptors but helps the mood as well."

Ostrow said he believes that medical marijuana has many benefits for diseases such as HIV, diabetes and Multiple Sclerosis.

The MMPAP looks to protect patients legally using medical marijuana as well as eliminating obstacles to medical marijuana's further development. They do so by supporting their beliefs with scientific evidence that medical marijuana actually can help patients.

THC or Tetrahydrocannabinol, is the main drug in marijuana. According to Halperin, the benefit it adds beyond the pain killing is significant in terminally ill patients who could see a mood improvement as a helpful increase in their quality of life.

That is something that other more traditional painkillers, such as Vicodin or Morphine, cannot provide.

While Halperin said he does not think that marijuana could be used in a small enough dosage to be practically applicable to the eyes, he did not oppose its use in other areas.

"I am not against other practitioners prescribing it if they felt it was appropriate on a case-by-case basis," Halpernin said.

Prescribing marijuana is not something that doctors in Illinois currently have to worry about. However, according to Ostrow, the Senate Public Health Committee is exploring the possibility that medical marijuana could be legalized in the near future.