

*The Cannabis Papers:
A citizen's guide to cannabinoids (2011)
By Publius*

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“Hi, my name is Publius and I have been an alcoholic since 1972.”

These words are unfortunately familiar to many. Such words uttered daily in thousands of Alcoholic Anonymous (AA) facilities did not work for me. I would go to AA meetings with an open but often still-inebriated mind. The stories were the problem. Those awful, all-too-human stories told by people about alcohol and its destructive ways. The tales of devastation would leave me so distressed / distraught that I would want to leave and go get a drink. I felt no solace or sympathy at these meetings – just loneliness and despair.

My alcoholism continued on its not so merry way until my doctor began to convince me of something I would come to know: that drinking alcohol and living long were not compatible. I quit drinking one day in the 1990s, exactly when does not matter, although truly I don't recall. Even though I had rejected AA as a source of assistance, I was not without help. I had health insurance and an encouraging doctor. He endorsed the use of cannabis to offset the symptoms of alcohol withdrawal – the harshest symptom being death. He also recommended a psychiatrist. With their help, along with family and friends, I stopped using and abusing alcohol.

I call the period from 1973 to 1983 my dark-drunk decade. I know it is eleven years – like I said, it was dark. Life became a never-ending dimly-lit tunnel. Sure, there was a light at the end of the tunnel – but I never reached or got any closer to it.

You could also say I lost my light chasing an alcohol “high.” I want to make a distinction between the high one gets from alcohol and the high produced by cannabinoids and the ECS. Knowing your high is important – like how an alcohol high will make you low. A cannabinoid high doesn't work that way. No one suggests people who are high on anandamide should be arrested for driving after a run in the park. Yet they are high – i.e., the runner's high from the endocannabinoid anandamide and the ECS. And no one should be arrested for the *“elevated sense of well-being”* mentioned on the warning label of the pharmaceutical cannabinoid Marinol.

How did cannabis help after I quit drinking alcohol? For me, it worked like a crutch. I had tried to quit alcohol many times. I was never successful until I used cannabis. Little did I know I was supplementing my ECS. A quick search of PubMed reveals how cannabinoids help. One report from 2007 is even titled *“The endocannabinoid signaling system: a potential target for next-generation therapeutics for alcoholism.”* Looks like me and lots of researchers agree – cannabinoids help overcome alcoholism.

Was it necessary? Seems so – and it worked. I'm no longer a drunk. You can call me a pothead, yeah, or even a cannabinoider. But you can't call me a drunk. Like I mentioned, I quit with the help of doctors, family and friends, and what I call a cannabis crutch. The last time I quit drinking I was pretty determined that I was going to be successful. And I was. I don't know if I could have quit without cannabis supplementing my ECS: what I do know is that cannabis made the alcohol withdrawal easier.

Cannabis can also curb the amount of alcohol consumption by being an alternative for relaxation. Many people conclude their workday with a beer or glass of wine. If cannabis were a legal alternative, some people would choose it instead of alcohol. It would be hard to call that a bad thing – especially given the research surrounding the ECS.

Alcohol prohibition failed and we now have a regulated and taxed market for alcohol production, distribution and consumption. The problems caused by alcohol are not going to be solved by outlawing its responsible use.

In a regulated and taxed market for adult cannabinoid use, different herbal cannabinoids (strains) would be regulated and tested to ensure consistent potency levels. Testing is already happening in medical states. Patients and dispensaries are using scientific techniques to determine which cannabinoids help different conditions – hence trusted products.

There would still be problems with a regulated and taxed market, such as zoning and civil liberties, but not the problems of prohibition. Such issues can be dealt with at the local level – where most of the taxes should stay.

Also, people who enjoy cannabis are similar to those who enjoy quality cigars, fine wines or organic foods. These groups share a discriminating taste for high quality items and are willing to pay more. They are selective and can interpret distinctions from one product to the next. *Cannabis connoisseurs* do the same thing. They will tell you in great detail the difference between strains just like one would describe the bouquets from different wines. For some it's a hobby and to others a serious business.

Either way, the violence associated with the cannabis market is violence caused by the state. By keeping cannabis in the illicit market, the state becomes complicit in the negative effects of its law. Until we end this prohibition, cannabis will be subject to the same practices that made Al Capone a household name.

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Search terms

Alcoholism; alcohol withdrawal syndrome; alcohol prohibition; PubMed ethanol cannabinoids; International Association for Cannabinoid Medicines (IACM); Safer Alternative for Enjoyable Recreation (SAFER).

Research and selected readings

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