

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

#7

## Chemotherapy and cannabinoids

*Fighting cancer is a fight for your life*

In 2005 at the age of 65, I was diagnosed with colon cancer and subsequently with lymph and liver cancer. That is a year I won't soon forget. When I realized the uphill battles I faced, I quickly determined I wanted to be a survivor, and my entire focus was on beating the cancers. My initial colon resection removed 23 cancerous lymph nodes and lesions. I then began a six-month regimen of chemotherapy prior to removal of half my liver in December – and back to chemo for an additional three months to ensure eradication.

Shortly before starting chemotherapy, I had a catheter implanted in my left arm. This made the hundreds of injections a lot less painful. The medical professionals were at their best, though my experience as a patient was chillingly lonely. My chemo routine was methodical. I went into the therapy center on alternate Wednesdays. I got a blood test. I filled out a form about what I was experiencing emotionally and physically. I sat in a chair for six hours while being injected with incredibly expensive chemo drugs. I also had to wear a pressurized bottle that injected a different chemo drug for two more days. I returned on Fridays to get unhooked from the bottle.

Wednesdays through Saturdays were usually better. On Sundays the nausea and diarrhea started and continued for about seven days. During this time I spent much of my day in bed – the term “sick as a dog” comes to mind. If you have ever experienced seasickness, imagine it combined with diarrhea and lasting for a week. (The “middle of the night while sleeping diarrhea” is downright embarrassing.) My doctor recommended anti-nausea medicine and I took up to 18 Imodium pills a day.

By Mondays and Tuesdays I generally felt stronger – then back to the center on Wednesday for more chemotherapy. Over the six months I had lost 40 pounds, some of my hair and basically looked and felt fatigued.

It was during this time that I was surprised when a close relative suggested that I try “marijuana” to relieve my symptoms. I did try it. Never having been a regular smoker of anything, the first few times I gagged from the smoke and vomited. I did notice my nausea had subsided and I attributed this fact to vomiting. As I became accustomed to taking smaller amounts of cannabis smoke more frequently, I learned to control my gag reflex. – That's when the amazement started: I would go from bed-ridden and nauseous to actually feeling fine in about ten minutes. – And yes, it felt like a miracle drug!

My enthusiasm was that of a born-again convert.

I wanted the world to know.

I wanted my fellow sufferers to know.

I wanted to share the discovery.

I wanted to tell everyone of an easy treatment that quickly relieved my symptoms.

I wanted to tell my doctor. I did. He obviously didn't want to hear about, nor comment on, my cannabis use. Crestfallen, I realized that he felt he could not. He too was a victim of the system – a victim of cannabis prohibition. My doctor wouldn't (or couldn't) discuss the healing effects of cannabinoids. We were at an impasse. The medicine that worked against the nausea was not discussable. The medicine that didn't control the nausea and made me feel worse, we were free to discuss. That was a perplexing moment: exactly when my life mattered most, I couldn't talk to my doctor about how I was staying alive.

Vital to chemotherapy is the ability to keep food down – to stay hydrated. Vomiting was the problem – cannabis was the solution. I wanted to talk to my doctor about my effective treatment. But couldn't.

Our government has historically denied patients and scientific evidence regarding the healing effects of cannabis and cannabinoids. The feds go so far as to say that no evidence exists that “marijuana” has any medical value, as evident in the retention of cannabis as a Schedule 1 narcotic. ***Given the scientific findings and research, this is willful ignorance.*** Anyone with a computer and Internet access can educate themselves about cannabinoids. Aren't federal officials capable of this?

Fourteen state governments have laws to protect patients, doctors and caregivers. In states such as Oregon, Colorado, and Michigan, dispensaries are opening and thousands of patients and caregivers are now protected by law. In the past, our government has harassed doctors, raided dispensaries and threatened patients in medical cannabis states. We are witnessing the transformation of this situation. As the founders envisioned, the citizens are leading – now it's up to the government to follow.

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### ***Search terms***

Chemotherapy, cancers and cannabinoids; nausea; glioma; cannabidiol; vaporization; Americans for Safe Access (ASA).

### ***Research and selected readings***

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