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FREE THE WEED

After a long, hard day at work, James decides to head straight to the bar. At the bar, he spends the next few hours throwing back beers and forgetting the troubles of the day. Similarly, after a long day at work, Carter heads to a dark alley, finds a local dealer, strikes a deal, and returns home with a bag of marijuana. The next few hours are spent puffing the green in a dark room with the doors locked, experiencing existential realities, and forgetting the troubles of the day. Illegal narcotics in general are considered taboo, and yet the utilization of a depressant like alcohol is considered to be a reasonable coping mechanism. As society and science progress, more places should be open to the idea of legalizing marijuana because it has medicinal and therapeutic value, and economic benefits.

Marijuana has been shown to have many medicinal values. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, marijuana is one of the most commonly used “medicinal herbs, with 183 million users worldwide.”¹ A clinical trial in Fort Worth, Texas was created, according to *Texas Monthly*, to test the effectiveness of CBD oil (Cannabidiol) on children from “ages two to fourteen who have a debilitating form of epilepsy called Lennox-Gastaut Syndrome [. . .] which causes them to suffer up to 150 seizures a day.”² The results

showed that after participating in the trial, many children’s daily seizure counts were “cut down by half.”² Scott Perry, “Cook Children’s lead neurologist in the study,” shares that “[CBD is a] multiple-target drug with multiple modes of action [which] makes it different from other drugs,” because they target specific areas of the brain.² With cannabis being multifaceted, its legalization could lead to an increase in research and could be put to more uses, such as a cure for cancer. According to Dr. Bonni Goldstein, medical director of Canna-Centers in Los Angeles, “more than 100 cannabinoids present in the plant target certain pathways in leukemia” and when “[the CBD] compounds bond to receptors, it causes the [cancer] cell to die.”³ More studies on cannabis could lead to a possible cure or an improvement in the efficacy of cancer treatment. While marijuana is legal in many states, there is the concern that, with it being a Schedule I drug, it has a “high potential for abuse and severe physical and psychological dependence”; however, according to *SAM Advanced Management Journal* “marijuana is more stable and safer than other pain-relief medications [and] [i]n comparison with heroin and alcohol, marijuana has a lower addiction rate of 9%.”^{1,4} Many states that have marijuana legalized have not legalized it for medical use. By fully legalizing marijuana, several thousands of patients can reap the medicinal value from it.

In addition to medicinal benefits, marijuana is proven to have therapeutic benefits. Cannabis has been shown to help with neuropathic pain. *Pharmacy Times*, a medical magazine, published a study conducted by New York State’s Medical Marijuana Program. This study analyzed how marijuana affected “200 participants, with an average age of 81,” who suffer from either multiple sclerosis or Parkinson’s disease.⁵ The results showed that “about 69% of the participants experienced some symptom relief, including pain relief (49%).”⁵ According to the *Puerto Rico Health Sciences Journal*, a peer-reviewed academic



journal, neuropathic pain “is currently managed with anticonvulsants,” which is used to mitigate pain but has terrible side effects; however, not only did medical marijuana help these older patients with their symptoms, but according to the study, as a result, “thirty-two percent of participants reduced their [. . .] pain medication.”^{6,5} Similarly, according to *Newsweek*, a recent study shows that “cancer patients increasingly use [marijuana] to alleviate the harsh symptoms of chemotherapy.”³ By legalizing marijuana, several more patients can be helped with combating their symptoms and their reliance on pain-relief prescriptions will decrease. Along with pain relief, marijuana is considered to help with mental health. According to *Medical Cannabis and Cannabinoids*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol) are shown to help with agitation, anxiety, aggression, depression, insomnia, restlessness, and memory.⁷ Mental health is a broad spectrum and the drugs used to help, such as antidepressants, do not necessarily always work. Different components of cannabis target specific illnesses. The legalization of marijuana can lead to more studies on the different components, which can lead scientists to find more therapeutic uses and help more people who suffer from mental illnesses.

Marijuana has been shown to benefit the economy. The legalization of marijuana in several states has shown an increase in job opportunities as well as “funding to the state in the form of taxes,” according to *UWIRE Text*, a news wire service.⁸ In 2020, according to the Oklahoma Tax Commission, “dispensaries statewide brought [in] over \$831 million in revenue sales.”⁸ Legalizing marijuana provides an advantage over prohibition because it allows the government to collect taxes. For example, according to Colorado’s

marijuana tax data, the first two years of legalization showed significant monetary revenue “[with] Colorado collect[ing] more than \$135 million in taxation revenue and fees.”⁹ Colorado is known for being one of the first states to legalize marijuana. In just two years, the government was able to collect millions of dollars in tax revenue. According to the *UMass Law Review*, an academic journal, currently every year “billions of dollars are spent on federal enforcement of anti-marijuana laws,” but the legalization of marijuana could lead to substantial savings and that money could be put towards something better, such as cash-strapped schools and public transportation.¹⁰ Along with state income, this market can create several job opportunities. The previous journal states that the marijuana industry has been shown to have “[an] estimated 300,000 full-time jobs existing” and, according to the *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, that could range from “workers who can grow and package marijuana for sale in [. . .] [g]overnment approved grow-ops [to] individuals who can work in educational sessions” to promote safe use of the drug.^{10,9} Not only will marijuana bring income for states, it will also help families put food on the table. Some may argue that by realizing marijuana’s economic potential, more dispensaries will open, making it easier for children to get a hold of the drug. However, according to *Canada-United States Law*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, in states like Washington and Colorado, there is improved protection of minors “as the consumer base is tightly controlled through proof of age as well as retail location and advertising requirements.”¹¹ Thus, like alcohol, future laws regarding marijuana will have legal measures put into place to protect minors. Consequently, marijuana should be legalized because it poses economic benefits for states and its citizens.



In conclusion, marijuana has been demonstrated to help society. No drug is completely safe, including cannabis, but that does not mean its benefits should be neglected. Studies on marijuana are still primitive, but society should be open to its possibilities. With the legalization of marijuana, people like Carter can find a full-time job and will no longer have to hide in a dark alley to purchase their merchandise. They will be unashamed of how they choose to soothe their pain, just like how James uses alcohol unafraid of its repercussions.

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