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His job involves working with other veterans on a daily basis, and he has seen how many of them experience the same positive results when using cannabis to treat their chronic pain and PTSD.

He asked we use the name "Anthony" to honor a friend who was killed in action.

"I know many, many veterans who smoke weed for, specifically, PTSD," he said. "A lot of them picked it up because of their PTSD."

Researchers examining the relationship between cannabis and PTSD in Israel have seen promising results in clinical studies of rats, and a psychiatrist in New Mexico saw a 75 percent reduction in all three areas of PTSD symptoms when using cannabis to treat 80 military veterans with PTSD in 2014. His study was published in the *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*.

This September, however, the first-ever clinical study to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of smoked marijuana as a medicine on humans is set to begin – and the study is aimed at treating veterans with PTSD.

California-based research nonprofit Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, was awarded a \$2.1 million grant by Colorado's state health department to conduct this research.

MAPS spokesperson Brad Burge said the sheer number of veterans suffering from PTSD is one of the reasons behind the study.

"We also regularly hear from veterans organizations that they're not getting the care that they need through the VA, and many veterans also report using marijuana successfully to treat their PTSD symptoms," Burge said.

Burge said it was only after years of jumping through hoops with the federal government, and a lengthy appeals process, that MAPS was able to get started on this study.

The smoke prophet

Aside from the week his mother died, Hawk Marsden has tended to his medical marijuana garden every day throughout the past four years.

It's a small operation, located in the garage and backyard of a residential home in North Portland's Piedmont neighborhood, although he's in the process of moving the nursery to a larger, more commercial venue in rural Clackamas County.

On a recent sweltering August afternoon, a steady stream of friends and clients, including several military veterans, dropped by the house to smoke, pick up medicine and hang out on the backyard patio.

Some stayed for a while, finding a seat on one of the dozen or so mismatched wooden, wicker and stuffed chairs that had been arranged into two sitting areas beneath a large palm plant with wide, low-hanging leaves.

The outdoor hangout was decorated with Bohemian tapestries, Tibetan prayer flags, various mobiles, potted plants and hanging lights.

A hodgepodge of smoking paraphernalia sat scattered across the circular glass-topped table, and a mix of jam-band melodies and classic rock drifted through the garden on the other side of the bamboo divider, where Marsden explained that this is where he teaches area veterans how to grow their own

medical marijuana.

"They call me the smoke prophet. Natives call me a medicine man," he said. "The plant saved my life."

Marsden was an "artillery man" in the Marine Corps for 24 years, but that's all he'll say about his military service.

He had PTSD long before that anyway, he said, from "a really brutal upbringing."

Before he began treating his PTSD and other chronic ailments, including prostate cancer, with medical marijuana, he said he was taking "a plethora of pills: anti-depressants, anti-psychotics – and then they had me on pick-me-up stuff and knock-me-down stuff."

Today, he's a grower specializing in strains that help veterans cope with their PTSD and chronic pain, and he said he's created a cross-breed that's particularly effective in treating PTSD.

Three years ago, he crossed Pre-79 Euphoria with pure Afghan Skunk while trying to create a new strain for chronic pain, he said.

"A person who is in pain 24 hours a day is predisposed to be an asshole," he said. The Euphoria acts as a mood changer, while the Afghan Skunk was "one of the strongest pain relievers in the garden," he said.

"Working for PTSD was a total accident," he said, but as it turned out smokers discovered it was turning off many PTSD triggers, such as over-alertness and an over-awareness of sights, sounds and colors.

He called the new strain Eughanie and has been growing it for veterans suffering from PTSD ever since. The strain is available through Rainbeaux Farms (rainbeauxfarms.com) and Marsden's offshoot project, an education-based nursery called U'Canna Tu (ucannatu.com).

Many of the veterans Marsden works with have limited means. He said he typically provides them with some finished product for immediate use, but also a clone of Eughanie or other effective strain that will eventually yield enough bud to last them six months to a year.

He said many growers harvest six weeks too soon, which doesn't allow the medicinal qualities in the plant to fully develop. That's why he teaches veterans how to grow properly, to maximize the medicinal benefits. His pupils call him and stop by with their questions. He seems to have time for anyone who needs it.

It's like the old Chinese proverb, he said, "Teach a man to fish."

He said it's never been about the money for him. "It's about lives." His nursery survives mainly on donations.

"In most cases, most of the vets who come here end up getting a strain for free," he said.

In cases where his clients rent or live in public housing, he'll tend the plants for them in his garden until they're ready to start flowering. He explained that most of the vivacious, towering outdoor plants we were standing among actually belonged to clients.

He pointed to a plant he called Ice by Nirvana, saying it works for both moderate pain and "frightmares," the insomnia-invoking flashbacks many veterans with PTSD experience at night. Vortex is another strain he grows that's popular among vets. "It diminishes the pain but also gets them up off the couch," he said.

But he's just one in a vast network of veterans who grow medical marijuana, he said.

"Veterans all over the state grow it for themselves and for guys at their local American Legions and VFWs," he said. "They keep it on the down-low because of the fact that they don't want any issues – they are trying to protect their guys."

He said many of them live in Oregon counties that declined to legalize recreational production and sales, and some live in states that still prohibit marijuana altogether, such as Idaho.

Access denied

While medical marijuana is legal in 25 states and in Washington D.C., to many veterans living within those jurisdictions, it doesn't feel that way.

Many veterans are hesitant to discuss their legal marijuana use openly for fear it might jeopardize their benefits, the outcome of open disability claims or, in cases such as Anthony's, their employment.

That's in part because doctors working at clinics and hospitals for the Department of Veterans Affairs, where most veterans get their medical needs met, are prohibited from recommending marijuana to their patients, even in states where it's legal.

Since 2010, however, the agency has permitted veterans living in states where medical marijuana is legal to seek the drug outside of the federal system.

Dr. David Lynam, a psychiatrist with the PTSD Clinical Team at the VA hospital in Vancouver, Wash., said he has patients who tell him they use cannabis to treat their PTSD, and that disclosure is not something that would cause them to lose their benefits or preclude them from services in any way.

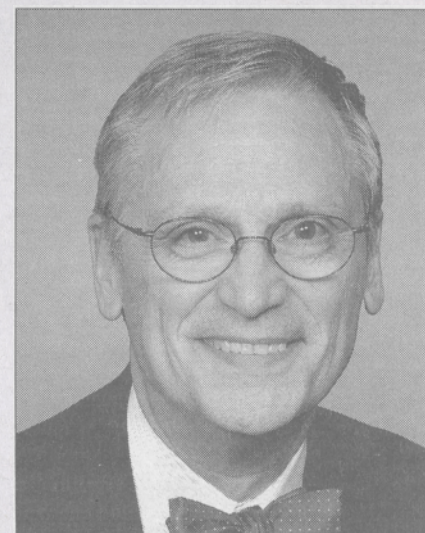
He said he's quite interested in hearing whether cannabis is working for his patients, who typically prefer indica – the more sedative and relaxing of the two major types of cannabis plants.

"Regarding cannabis," he said, "I have not seen a high-quality, objective study for its use in treating PTSD. However it appears to be widely used in the community to treat PTSD symptoms. Many of the veterans I see tell me they smoke or ingest cannabis, and several have a positive benefit for sleep in particular."

For many veterans, the stance their former employer takes on marijuana makes them uneasy; the federal government still categorizes marijuana as a Schedule I drug, on par with heroin as an illegal and highly addictive street drug with no medical benefits.

When the Drug Enforcement Administration denied petitions to reclassify marijuana this past month, several veterans who were initially willing to go on the record with Street Roots about their marijuana use changed their minds, citing their fear of repercussions from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"There is no way I would talk to you about it," one veteran who uses medical marijuana



"It's quite clear that medical marijuana has therapeutic benefits for veterans. I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with veterans and their families who claim that this has been life-altering for them – and it doesn't carry the toxic consequence of opioids."

– U.S. REP. EARL BLUMENAUER (D-OREGON)