

Cannabis Café?

The conundrum of access to medical pot

With the recent opening of a Cannabis Café in Portland and the announcement of a planned café for Eugene, Oregon's medical marijuana patients may have something to be excited about. Under Oregon's law, patients must take their medication in private, and employers and local businesses generally don't offer any such accommodations. The proposed Cannabis Café may provide an alternative to patients who would otherwise need to return home or risk breaking the law to medicate.

The second potential benefit would be to increase access to marijuana for Oregon patients. Currently, patients must grow for themselves or find someone trustworthy who can grow for them. This creates a conundrum for terminal patients and patients undergoing chemotherapy who may need access to marijuana right away. While a Cannabis Café may help address some of these problems with Oregon's law, prudence requires us to reflect on whether this is the best approach to resolving these deficiencies.

The name Cannabis Café, for many, conjures images of drug tourists frequenting the cafes of Amsterdam, a perception that suggests a purpose outside of serving chronically and terminally ill people. One wonders whether there may also be plans for "insulin cafés" for diabetics; but I doubt whether anyone would seriously consider such a prospect. Medical marijuana is a medication for individuals with legally recognized medical conditions, and should be treated as a medication. No one has proposed that any other medication should be taken in a social environment or be the basis of social interactions, so why should this be so for marijuana?

The problem is that the idea of a Cannabis Café blurs the lines between two separate political issues: medical marijuana, on the one hand, and legalization of marijuana for recreational use, on the other. Since the inception of Oregon's Medical Marijuana Program (OMMP) in 1999 patients have been accused of using the program to protect illicit drug use and other illicit activities – an unfair accusation for anyone dealing with the nausea and discomfort of chemotherapy or debilitating neuropathy, among other conditions. Unfortunately, programs like Cannabis Cafés will continue to put patients in the awkward position of defending a medication that makes their lives bearable and will embolden groups like "Protect Our Society" to continue their campaign against sick and dying Oregonians.

While good intentions may well be behind the opening of Cannabis Cafés in Oregon, the benefits to medical patients will likely be outweighed by the risk of causing Oregon's program to be perceived as a ruse for legalization, rather than a compassionate measure meant to alleviate the suffering of the chronically and terminally ill, as was originally intended.

Access to marijuana continues to be a major barrier for many patients, and practical and respectable avenues need to be explored for addressing these issues. Some have proposed state-licensed dispensaries, which voters may have the opportunity to vote on in the next election cycle. Similar programs have been implemented in several other states, including New Mexico, but not enough time has yet passed to determine the success of such programs. Nevertheless, this is an important issue that is worthy for debate. In the meantime, patients still need all the help they can get to become self-sufficient and get the most out of the OMMP, which is why Compassion Center has always focused on educating patients and providing the tools necessary for success under Oregon's program.

Compassion Center is a nonprofit medical clinic that has been serving medical marijuana patients in Lane County since 2001. In addition to providing patients the opportunity to see a compassionate doctor with whom they can discuss the medical use of marijuana, we also educate our patients about the OMMP and provide them with classes on growing and making medical preparations of marijuana to help ensure that they obtain the maximum benefit from Oregon's program. While the OMMP still has some problems, solutions to these problems should reflect the reality of the medical conditions of patients who find relief through use of marijuana, as well as respect the will of Oregon voters who made such a compassionate program possible.

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THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INCITING HATE

The Civics Glossary defines "hate" speech as type of speech which is used to deliberately offend an individual; or racial, ethnic, religious or other group. Such speech generally seeks to condemn or dehumanize the individual or group; or express anger, hatred, violence or contempt toward them.

This definition is overwhelmed by the vitriolic content of Pacifica Forum's Dec. 11 presentation by Jimmy Marr on "The National Socialist Movement: An insider's view of America's radical right," which was enabled and passively condoned by the UO administration allowing this event to occur in the EMU's Walnut Room.

As if this misuse of public university property was not frustrating, offensive and frightening enough, CTV producer Chris Kelsay videotaped, aired and thereby amplified throughout the entire community this same presentation on CTV on Dec. 17. His sloppy partial editing of some of the "kill the Jews" chants from the National Socialist Movement's documentary of a rally held in Phoenix, Ariz., and shown during the PF's Dec. 11 event represents CTV's (our local public access station) and his lame defense for airing this video as "free speech not hate speech."

Adding insult to these incitements to hate and violence is the fact the city of Eugene dedicates \$7,500 of our public monies to fund

UO RESPONDS TO HATE

In the Dec. 17 *EW*, Joseph Lieberman wrote a commentary ("Free Speech vs. Hate Speech") about a recent non-university organized meeting held on the UO campus.

I was at the Pacifica Forum meeting where the presenter espoused abhorrent anti-Semitic and anti-immigrant sentiments and glorified neo-Nazi principles. It is unacceptable that such a close-minded and hateful presentation can find an audience within our community. When strong ideas are expressed, institutions of higher education, including the UO, have an obligation to engage in scholarly discovery and analysis. However, the university should neither be considered supportive of, nor affiliated with, such ideas as expressed by the Pacifica Forum. The space is currently used under a policy that allows retired professors to book campus rooms free of charge.

University leadership is purposeful about the individuals and groups who represent its voice. It's a protection we take seriously. As such, we are addressing our policies about how best to proceed with our mission and values while safeguarding the campus community and the values of free speech. We will continue to focus on education and engagement as we always have when issues and controversy test our convictions and elicit reflection. While I strongly believe that the UO must defend the free exchange of ideas and promote intellectual inquiry, we have a greater responsibility to turn ideas into the discovery of knowledge in a manner that is inclusive and welcoming to all our students and the communities we serve.

I invite the community's involvement in this process of scholarly engagement and challenge each of us to take personal responsibility for creating an environment where hateful acts and the espousal of hateful ideas, without context to the university mission of continuing education, is not tolerated.

Charles Martinez
UO vice president,
institutional equity and diversity