

## Is Marijuana a Missing Link?

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Healthcare providers, mental health specialists, and law enforcement throughout the country are all dealing with an unexplained surge in mental health problems and violence. Unfortunately, there has not previously been a clearly identified cause, but perhaps now we are beginning to gain some focus.

It is increasingly common to hear emergency department or hospital reports that a given patient has had a new suicide attempt, new or recurrent psychotic episode, or some version of violent behavior. If a urine toxicology can be obtained, it seems that a positive cannabinoid screen may be dismissed as “just pot.” Healthcare providers incorrectly presume that the patient “must have tangled with” PCP, LSD, Methamphetamines, K-2 or the like. I advance the notion that marijuana plays a central role in the surge of psychiatric issues that are being witnessed, and this is either being recklessly overlooked, or intentionally ignored. As I proposed in 2003 (1) along with other drug policy leaders, Medical Excuse Marijuana was, and still is, a Pandora’s box that has been opened.

The evidence is now mounting that the occurrence of cannabis use disorders and marijuana use differs between the states that have adopted “medical” marijuana legislation and those that have not (2).

Drs. Miller and Oberbarnscheidt (3) have graciously agreed to our reprint of their recent article on the potential connection between marijuana and violence. They have examined the potential connection between several of the high-profile acts of violence and marijuana use. I would take one step further in suggesting that law enforcement and mental health professionals are seeing this played out daily, but may not recognize the connection.

The additional phenomenon that has not been clearly understood is the surge in narcotic overdoses and overdose deaths. While data is not always available, marijuana use that preceded narcotic abuse and overdose may be the common denominator. For instance, heroin overdose rates in Colorado were fairly constant until 2011, and they tripled between 2011 and 2015 as marijuana became legal for medical uses and was ultimately legalized for recreational use. (4).

What are the implications for policy makers along with healthcare leaders?

1. Marijuana must be regarded as a serious drug of abuse that has serious medical and mental health consequences.
2. Future expansion of marijuana legalization should be stopped, and existing initiatives that make marijuana use more accepted should be rolled back.
3. The growing marijuana “big business” needs to be exposed for capitalizing on the suffering of unsuspecting youth as well as harmful societal consequences.

4. We absolutely must stop yielding to the marijuana lobby and the mistaken notion that marijuana is “just pot.”

### **About the Author**

Dr. Voth is a specialist In Internal Medicine, Pain management, and Addiction Medicine as well as a medical director at Stormont-Vail Health Care in Topeka, Kansas. He is the chairman of the Institute On Global Drug Policy, is recognized as an international authority on drug use, and lectures on drug policy-related issues, pain management, and appropriate prescribing practices. Dr. Voth previously served as the former medical director of the St. Francis Chemical Dependence Services. He also serves as an advisor on alcohol and drug abuse issues to the Kansas State Board Of Healing Arts, is a member of the National Advisory Committee For the Center For Substance Abuse Treatment of HHS, and is A Clinical Associate Professor of Internal Medicine at The University of Kansas School Of Medicine.

Dr. Voth has advised Reagan, Clinton, both Bush administrations, and has advised or testified for numerous Congressional Offices on drug related issues. He has appeared on or consulted to, numerous other radio media, and has been quoted by numerous international print media.

### **Conflict of Interest**

I declare that I have no proprietary, financial, professional or other personal interest of any nature or kind in any product, service and/or company that could be construed as influencing the position presented in, or the review of, the manuscript entitled *Is Marijuana A Missing Link?*.

## References

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