Isn’t smoking harmful? Won’t smoking medical marijuana do more harm than good?

There are many ways to use medical marijuana; not all patients have to smoke in order to gain relief. For example, some patients eat medical marijuana or use a tincture or spray. If a patient does require smoking, there are tools called vaporizers that remove the potentially harmful effects of smoking. The best method of delivery should be decided by the patient’s medical provider, just as a (s)he decides whether to prescribe other medications in pill, suppository, or patch form. Medical marijuana legislation is so important because it allows me to have this conversation with my medical provider.

Isn’t there already an effective medicine called Marinol that is made from marijuana?

Marinol is a pill made of synthetic THC, one of the many compounds found in the marijuana plant. There are patients that claim to experience side effects with Marinol that are not present when they use marijuana. Often, Marinol is an unrealistic treatment option because it is difficult to keep down a pill and a glass of water when battling chronic nausea. This is when the other delivery options for medical marijuana are especially useful.

Even if legislation is passed in New Mexico to allow the medical use of marijuana, won’t it still be illegal under federal law? Aren’t you worried about federal prosecution?

The majority of patients that are arrested while using or possessing marijuana for medical purposes are arrested by state and local authorities and are prosecuted under state and local laws. Therefore, a program that protects legitimate patients under state law is extremely important and offers very significant safeguards. As a patient, I take many calculated risks in order to treat my condition – all treatments and medications threaten significant side effects and consequences. The federal government is one more type of risk and only I can decide if I am willing to take a chance in order to gain relief, but with the protections offered by a state medical marijuana program, a decision to treat is less costly than it would be otherwise. We deserve the support of our state as we struggle to overcome pain and discomfort.

If we say that we support marijuana for medical use, aren’t we sending the wrong message to our kids?

Absolutely not. Every patient is someone’s child, parent, sister, brother, or grandparent. The message that a medical marijuana program sends to our children is this: If your loved one is sick, our state policy makers, law enforcement, and fellow citizens will look upon them with compassion and will work to support their right to any medical treatment that is recommended by a medical professional and helps to alleviate their pain and suffering. There are many substances that are appropriate for medical treatment and not for recreational use; we don’t worry that children will think it is alright to use heroine just because there are legitimate uses for closely related drugs such as morphine.
Will medical marijuana increase the number of intoxicated drivers on the road?

As patients, we are prescribed many medications that warn against operating a vehicle. We believe that patients can be responsible when administering their treatment routines. Of course, there are serious consequences for driving while intoxicated, and medical marijuana legislation does not attempt to protect anyone, even patients, for penalties resulting from irresponsible use.

I don’t want people to judge me incorrectly - if I advocate for medical marijuana, won’t everyone assume that I already use it?

There are many ways to answer questions regarding this issue. Some advocates of medical marijuana have no interest in using this medication themselves; they simply believe it is the right thing for policy makers to do. Others have a loved one that could benefit greatly from such a law. There are also advocates that are patients and are desperately fighting to gain legal access to a treatment option that they would like to talk to their doctors about, or that they might already use in order to gain relief despite fear of prosecution. Each of these advocates are legitimate and powerful, and each have different answers when they are asked, “Do you already smoke marijuana?” Do not ever feel that you have to disclose any information that you are not comfortable with in order to be an effective advocate. I became involved and passionate about this issue even though I do not use medical marijuana because I am a cancer patient, I know what it means to truly suffer, and I believe that I have the right to discuss all available and promising treatment options with my medical providers. Should I ever need it, I should not fear arrest for attempting to stay alive and maintain a quality of life.

Isn’t this a front for marijuana legalization? What are your real motives?

As a patient, I can assure you that the only objective is to gain access to a medical treatment that will help to alleviate pain and suffering. The people that will benefit from this legislation are those who are chronically and painfully ill or facing death. There is an additionally penalty under the proposed legislation to be given to anyone that attempts to participate in the medical marijuana program using false information or fraudulent identification cards. We take this program extremely seriously…lives are at stake.

My name is Erin Armstrong and I was diagnosed with cancer when I was 17 years old. In the nearly eight years since my diagnosis, I have endured many surgeries and rounds of cancer treatment. Although I am able to live an active and fulfilling life, I am still fighting cancer and truly know what it is like to spend long periods of time longing for nausea relief and increased treatment options. In 2004, I became acquainted with the work of the Drug Policy Alliance and joined the fight for legal access to medical marijuana. For two years, I have devoted agonizing amounts of emotional energy and sleepless nights fighting for the lives of all those to whom I am eternally bound through common experience and suffering – those who are too sick to advocate on their own behalf. From of all the patients that will gain from your efforts, thank you for your belief in patients’ rights and compassion.