

LETTERS

CANNABIS REGULATION

Cannabis regulation: the need to develop guidelines on use

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A regulated cannabis market could be a good thing.¹ Potential benefits range from breaking the dominance of drug cartels and redistributing law enforcement budgets to taxation, consumer choice, quality control, and reducing criminalisation of mostly young and otherwise law abiding citizens. But we mustn't end up with a net public health loss.

Any attempt at regulation must protect young people from early initiation into use and minimise the risk of a collateral increase in tobacco consumption. Cannabis is a gateway to tobacco use.² In most countries, more than 80% of cannabis smokers mix cannabis with tobacco³; this has synergistic health harms and makes it harder to quit.⁴ A regulated market should encourage the production of cannabis with lower levels of tetrahydrocannabinol balanced by cannabidiol to reduce the frequency of unwanted effects, such as memory impairment and paranoia.

Governments will need to consider how to educate users about harms, support informed decisions around personal levels of consumption, and allow early detection of those at risk of problematic use. An appealing strategy is to develop guidelines similar to those for alcohol. However, in a 2013 global survey of more than 65 000 drinkers,⁵ only 20% of participants who were aware of their country's alcohol guidelines paid attention to these guidelines.

We should learn from this finding and develop honest, acceptable guidelines around the mode of consumption and dose

related nature of most cannabis related harms to create credible safer guidelines on use. One such example, based on the experience of 38 000 cannabis users, is the Global Drug Survey Highway Code.³

Finally, regulation will require serious post-marketing surveillance and the implementation of the smartest, most independent, public health policies that scientific lobbyist-free evidence can support. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it.

Competing interests: I am founder and managing director of Global Drug Survey and developer of the cannabis drugs meter app (www.drugsmeter.com).

Full responses at: www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g3382/rr/699541 and www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g3382/rr/699819.

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