



Media Release

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What we don't know might hurt us – the medicinal cannabis debate

How, when and why Australian health professionals might employ medicinal cannabis needs to be better understood before legalising the drug for use, says researcher and palliative care specialist, Associate Professor Richard Chye.

“Medicinal cannabis is useful, but we don't know how it's useful or who it is useful for and how it should be given to people to be effective. That is why we need to do the research.”

He also said regulation was important.

“It needs to be regulated, like any drug. Morphine used to be illegal but was proved useful, was regulated and it was tolerated for medical use. With cannabis, there will be myriad compounds involved – different plants from different areas producing different effects. So we need to be very careful about how we regulate that so it is used effectively.”

Professor Chye said society's unwillingness to consider the drug in a medical context could only be overcome by rigorous evidence.

“We don't know how to use it, we need research to know how to answer those questions about cannabis,” he said.

PCA CEO Liz Callaghan supported Professor Chye's calls for more evidence.

“Like the Australian community, the palliative care sector reflects a number of different opinions on legalising cannabis for medicinal purposes. PCA supports the trials, we support the national debate about its use, but we need to know first if it will improve the lives of people living with a life-limiting illness. If it does, how do health professionals use it so it remains safe?

“We recognise that the research process will take time and would urge Federal Parliament to consider a program that might enable compassionate use of the drug for those with a terminal diagnosis. This may require small short-term amendments to legislation, but may provide significant comfort,” Ms Callaghan said.

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