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Cannabis Research Institute Issues Statement Regarding Vape Oils and Respiratory Illness

A Press Release from the International Research Center on Cannabis and Health

(New York, NY) September 17th, 2019 – Due to a growing concern, lack of clarity in media reports and the impact on public policy, the International Research Center on Cannabis and Health (IRCCH) has announced a warning to consumers and patients regarding vaporized oil products, especially for products that are produced in unregulated and illicit markets. The risks in the illicit markets are so vastly much greater, consumers must receive messaging that if they want to vape concentrates, they should exclusively use authentic products from reputable companies in regulated markets. IRCCH is an internationally recognized research center based in New York, that focuses on providing education and research on cannabis and health.

IRCCH recognizes that the current health reports are alarming; however, it cautions that policy should be driven from scientific findings rather than generalizations that do not reflect the causative nature of these health problems. IRCCH acknowledges that root cause of this problem may be in the dilution of cannabis and hemp but emphasize that no single causative agent has been identified by any agency or group that explains the symptoms being reported. Vaporized products have resulted in hundreds of cases of severe pulmonary disease¹. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) has reported 476 possible cases of severe pulmonary disease in 33 states attributed to vaping cannabis and/or nicotine products. Six deaths have been reported in Illinois, Oregon, Minnesota, Indiana, Kansas, and California. With the exception of 1 case in Oregon, all cases have been associated with products from illicit or unregulated markets.

Most lung-related illnesses related to vaporizing have been diagnosed as exogenous lipid pneumonia, an illness caused by inflammation in the lung due to foreign lipid material that cannot be broken down or otherwise cleared. The New York Department of Health found “very high levels of vitamin E acetate” in nearly all related cannabis samples which led New York to subpoena 3 companies marketing thickening agents for vape products. Vitamin E acetate has received a great deal of media attention but is unlikely to be the sole cause of the current illnesses. The CDC, scientists and other agencies have reiterated that Vitamin E acetate was not detected in all samples tested and no specific cause is currently known to be responsible for the spike in pulmonary disease². There may be a temptation to begin banning products in regulated markets, but this will drive all demand into the black market which is the source of the problem at hand.

“These illnesses indicate that other factors are very likely contributing to these illnesses,” said Jahan Marcu, Ph.D., Co-founder and Chief Science Officer of IRCCH. “Terpenes are considered GRAS³ but excessively high levels of specific terpenes may also play a role in lung

¹ <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00421.asp>

² https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/t0906_telebriefing_investigation_pulmonary_disease_e-cigarettes.html

³ GRAS – Generally Regarded as Safe

inflammation. At the end of the day, concentrated terpenes are solvents while ambient levels are safe to use in aromatherapy,” adds Dr. Marcu.

Marcu and colleagues have published their concerns regarding similar vape-related issues starting around vaporization in 2015. And last month published an article in Nature magazine, highlighting that current regulations do not allow meaningful research to be conducted on products currently being used by consumers^{4,5,6}.

“While consumer safety is always our priority, it is notable that the Vitamin E hypothesis does not explain several of the commonly reported symptoms. What’s even more disturbing is that there is little discussion around whether the products used by these patients are from regulated or nonregulated sources” said Dr. Jan Roberts, Co-founder and CEO of IRCCH and Partners in Health and Wellbeing, one of the largest integrative and mental health practices on the East Coast. “I’d advise patients and consumers to only use products that are from regulated markets with sufficient oversight,” says Dr. Roberts, who also serves as a Governor’s Appointee to the State of Delaware’s Medical Marijuana Advisory Board.

“An important question is whether this a new phenomenon or a newly recognized phenomenon,” says Dr. Marcu, “Based on preliminary data, there seems to be an actual increase in May and June of 2019, suggesting the current respiratory illnesses associated with vaping are new occurrences”⁷. As nicotine and cannabis vaping are a global phenomenon, the absence of cases reported outside of the US supports initial conclusions that the illnesses are caused by dynamics specific to the US’s illicit markets, that nicotine and cannabis *per se* are unlikely to be the direct cause of these illnesses.

Julia Bramante, Chair of the Cannabis Chemistry Subdivision (CANN) of the division of Chemical Health and Safety (CHAS) of the American Chemical Society, remarks “Analysis of these products shows consistent issues with unwanted adulterants or additives. Some appear benign, some less so. Further testing and culmination of data is required to definitively determine the causative factor or factors being observed.”

IRCCH has called on companies selling diluents to publicly disclose all ingredients and their concentrations immediately.

About International Research Center on Cannabis and Health (IRCCH):

IRCCH is a research, education, and consulting institute located in New York City that is focused on cannabis and its impact on health, including both physical and mental health. **IRCCH** is a privately held organization that partners with researchers worldwide on both translational and experimental pharmacological studies. **IRCCH** serves as an educator and consultant to state governments, universities, clinicians, labs, and consumers. Its focus is to provide objective

⁴ <https://www.projectcbd.org/industry/how-safe-your-vape-pen>

⁵ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02531-6>

⁶ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/how-to-choose-a-weed-vape-pen-127872/>

⁷ https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/t0906_telebriefing_investigation_pulmonary_disease_e-cigarettes.html

research on cannabis and its therapeutic use by bridging the gap between the lab and the patient. It is a subsidiary of Partners in Health and Wellbeing LLC, one of the largest mental and integrative healthcare practices on the East Coast.

About the Cannabis Chemistry Subdivision of the American Chemical Society (CANN):

CANN serves as a pillar of legitimacy for the cannabis enterprise through promoting scientific advancement and empowering community.

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