**The Cannabis Road to Mental Health.**

MCST.613: Fall 2020 MCST 613 Medical Cannabis Symposium Reflection

2020 will go down as a historic year. COVID-19 has affected us all, some physically, financially, and especially mentally. And upon reflecting upon what I have learned from this first semester and the symposium, I see mental health as the strongest drive for the cannabis industries presence, growth, and future. I see my background as an earlier pioneer and advocate of cannabis in the Oakland / Bay Area, evolving with the MCST program into a National Advocate for Cannabis and other Natural Therapeutics that address the underlying mental health issue that may be hidden behind recreational cannabis. I would like to conduct research on our “Recreational” users and discover their true motivations for using cannabis. Why was the need for cannabis so strong that we risked so much to grow, sell, or use cannabis? My personal experience tells me that there is a lot of mental health issues like depression that “recreational” cannabis addresses. I would like to develop a product that can increase mental health for our recreational users in a healthier way than smoking cannabis or using other drugs as a coping mechanism. Is there a way we can micro dose our way to a “Constant High” that removes the need to use harmful smoke in our lungs? Or an expensive habit that dominates our budget. Is there a chemical structure that can be designed with cannabis to mimic the “High” of some illicit drugs? Could this product help during rehab? All these questions are on our Cannabis Road to Mental Health.

I have used Cannabis for at least 20 years. My earliest times were during my high school years. It started out as a progression from having fun drinking alcohol. I do not really think I even thought about the connection from moving from a drug that is know for being a coping mechanism for some depressed people to cannabis. But by the time I got to college I was in a cultural wave of people getting together and smoking a group of 3- 5 people. Cannabis went from being something we did alongside drinking alcohol to becoming the activity. We would get together “To Smoke”, not get together to hang out with each other. Primary reason for getting together was to consume cannabis. What we were doing would technically be considered “recreational” but were we truly having fun or could this be seen as “group medicating”. And if so, what was our sickness?

Over time this question has run in the back of my head, but during this semester the question became more pronounced. I began to see that it was the quest to maintain a pleasant mind state that was driving us to consume. Do the heavier smokers are having the hardest time coping to the stress of their life? Are they consuming large amounts cannabis in attempts to maintain a fleeting feeling of happiness? I would commission a cohort study, with all participants consuming cannabis recreationally regularly. Participants consuming approximately the same amounts recreationally would be the control group. With additional groups introduced to supplements developed to reduce mental stress / increase the happy feeling. The goal would be to see if any of the supplements decrease the need to smoke. Can we achieve the happy feeling in a more effective manner biologically as well as financially?

Part of the cannabis industries success has been due to the large amounts of money individuals spend. I used to be one of these individuals and I am personally convinced that I was not “recreating” as I decided to spend my last money on Cannabis to ensure that the mental state remained happy throughout the night. Not having any cannabis for a regular smoker can cause its own stress that only compounds the stress the individual was dealing with in the first place. As I spent upwards of $60 for 3.5 grams, I could not help but feel the trapped feeling like there was no other way for me to achieve my happy place without this extremely expensive habit.

Creating a solution would truly separate cannabis smokers who are trapped in a repetitive cycle with no alternatives from people who just enjoy a little bit of Cannabis on a nice beach. These two subgroups need to be treated differently and not assumed that the “recreational” group is entirely happy and fine. Mental health is a very real motivation for cannabis smokers and is often overlooked. Similar too how the people who drink the most at the party are sometimes using alcohol to deal with depression and are not as happy as they seem.

It was hearing Mary Wright’s testimony of navigating the cannabis waters on her own. Using trial and error to achieve her goal of figuring out what works for son, that was very inspiring to me. I feel like I am doing a bit of the same. Using my experience, and the experience others in attempt to understand, until my company, North Star Therapeutics, in a position to carry out studies in our own lab.

It was my interview for during our Medical Cannabis History course that connected me with an old classmate from U.C. Berkeley who is currently treating his dental patients with a cannabis tincture developed by his own company Organic Science. This was an amazing experience that demonstrated how close I am developing my own creation.

And it was Dr. Raphael Mechoulam’s keynote who solidified the idea that I can create a cannabinoid chemical structure that can mimic other chemicals in the body. Cannabinoid already have chemical structures that are remarkably similar too chemicals our body makes and needs. We can create a cannabinoid structure that could possibly sustain the high many search for in a less expensive way that gives us a healthier mental state.

Outside of the pandemic and the effects it has had on our lives. I have genuinely enjoyed the wealth of knowledge I have received from this program. I have met extraordinary classmates and have expanded my horizons. I am excited to continue this cannabis road to health!!!