**Springing in to Action.**

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

By James Gordon

Spring is such a great time of the year. New blossoms on the trees. New information. New ideas and New projects. Spring semester in the MCST program has really launch me into a new space, mentally, spiritually, and professionally. Mentally, because the enormous amounts of information my brain consumes from the courses creates a highly fertile environment for new ideas to formulate and grow. This information is so current and relevant to us all, as cannabis is touching so many lives. I find myself often in conversations with friends, industry professionals as well as doctors dispersing information learned directly from the program. Spiritually, I feel as though have found my entrepreneurial spirit. I am even more grounded than before in my passion and advocacy for the cannabis industry. Opportunities to advocate and work on projects are appearing like they were scripted into a movie. And professionally I have made more connections and giving myself greater chances at success.

The MCST program has truly enhanced my understanding of the cannabis industry, presenting extremely current information. Debbie Churgai with Americans for Safe Access, let us all know how far we as Americans are behind the rest of world regarding our access as citizens to cannabis, even though many of our states have law that allow recreational cannabis. Dr. Mahmoud A. ElSohly took us on a tour through the production of Marijuana grown at the University of Mississippi and the strict guidelines his facilities must ensure to provide high quality marijuana for laboratory testing. I think one of the biggest takeaways from his presentation was that there is such a high standard of quality they must maintain it can be preventative to being able to keep up with the public marketplace leading to a lack of new strains for laboratory test. This was echoed by Ziva Cooper, The Research Director with the UCLA Cannabis Research Initiative during her keynote. She expressed the lack quality cannabis was so extreme that she has to design her studies based about what cannabis is available, and then look to what possible information or conclusion could be gathered. This creates challenges for studying cannabis, and the longer this goes unstudied, the more at risk the use of marijuana becomes, with concentrates reaching as high as 94% THC. As well as American medicine will end up taking its cues from research done in countries cannabis is readily available for testing and exploring experimentally.

So, experimentation and research must be done by the companies that venture into creating products for consumption. And that is exactly what I did. During MCST 603 Cannabis Chemistry and Drug Delivery, I was so moved by the information I was receiving, I wanted to try to develop my own vape oil product. Dr. Pearson explained how oils need thinning agents added to allow for use in various devices such as a vape pen or directly on to a marijuana joint or blunt. My partner and I procured 100% Vegetable Glycerin from Amazon. We purchased a couple of grams of cannabis oil with a THC content of 90% and attempted to create a 40% VG/ 60% THC oil mix. This would considerably lower the THC concentration of the final product compared to that of the 90% THC oil. But our goal was to create a oil with a consistency that would allow it to be rolled on to the outside of a joint or the inside of a blunt using a oil bottle with a rolling top. We ordered the bottles from allibaba.com and began our process. But keep in mind I am conducting this real time during module 4 in MCST 603 which dealt cannabis formulations for inhalation. So, I am literally learning as I go. And while our VG/THC mix came out wonderfully in terms of consistency and effectiveness. It lacked one key component… stability. Our mix separated leaving the THC oil on top not, mixing with the VG solvent below. And what did Dr. Pearson’s lecture recommend? An emulsifier!!! But as I continued in the course, my concern for VG as a safe solvent began to grow. Should we really be inhaling substances such as VG which maybe FDA approved, but not tested for inhalation? I have personally had some shortness of breath from consuming cannabis from a vape pen, and after learning all of the issues with how solvents can breakdown into toxic compounds that can cause such effects as EVALI. We have decided to rethink our mixture and move in the direction of purer substances to inhale.

Sometimes we do not get things right. Sometimes we need to try so that we can see what works and what does not. Look at the results and then try again. I was recently asked by Frank Louis, the Director of the Sacramento Grow Green Association to write a letter on behalf of the Cannabis Equity Program to the City Council. As a member I was asked to urge the city council to continue to fund Sacramento’s equity program. This allowed me to give constructive feedback to the council so that they make the right adjustments to help this wonderful program continue to help communities damaged by the war on marijuana. This really gave me an opportunity to be an advocate for the health of our community, but to also help Sacramento influence other cities that are operating similar programs in California and across the country.

And last my journey this semester brought me to meet Dr. Encouse Golden, a doctor that has done extensive study in cancer and radiation at Cornell University. Like other doctors in the of cancer field he has begun to look at cannabis for all of its potential. He was so impressed with my hypothesis on “recreational” cannabis not being the most accurate term to describe the heavy cannabis users driving the cannabis market. As well as my coining of the phrase “group medication” referring to the collective ritual of people getting together to consume marijuana. Terms I mentioned in my fall reflection. Now I am not arrogant enough to think that no one else is making these claims or that these claims have not already been said. I will continue to research these terms. But the conversation with Dr. Golden was very encouraging. While he as had many of his studies published and suggested I look to get my ideas published. He also suggested that I investigate NFT’s or non-fungible tokens to document my hypothesis and phrases. I do not think I would have ever thought of that approach. This was really inspiring and made me realize how important advocacy was for me and how can you my degree to help others. This was all part of being in this wonderful program. This spring semester has been nothing short of amazing. I am looking forward to the summer.