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# Medical Marijuana stores grow in MN

MARCH 10, 2016 BY HANNAH BROADBENT

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BY EMILY NESS | the Statesman

People have been using Marijuana recreationally, religiously and even medically for thousands of years. Over time, the use of Marijuana has become far more prominent in all of the above. Recently, the use of medical Marijuana in particular has reached an all time high.

Currently, four states have legalized recreational Marijuana and twenty three states have legalized medical Marijuana. Minnesota has legalized medical Marijuana.

On March 1, 2016, Michelle Larson, director of the Office of Medical Cannabis and Kyle Kingsley, physician and founder of Vireo Health came to the University of Minnesota Duluth in order to educate students, staff and the public on the benefits of medical Marijuana.

Senior Jackson Rozeske, health care management major planned the entire event.

"I wanted to do something that was interesting and different for campus. I know that some other groups lobby for legalization, however, I wanted to look at Marijuana from a medical standpoint," Rozeske said. "I reached out to these individuals and they were willing to come. It was a great way to showcase the benefits of medical Marijuana."

The Office of Medical Cannabis is a place in which individuals who qualify can receive medical marijuana. The company's mission is to protect, maintain and improve the health of all Minnesotans.

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Larson who previously worked in Public Health was looking for a change when she applied to be the Director of the Office of Medical Cannabis. There were over 200 applicants and she was one of five finalists when she was offered the job. Larson joked that upon receiving the job, she was known as "Mary Jane" by family and friends. She takes her job very seriously, however.

"My job is incredibly rewarding. I have seen the quality of life of so many people that were previously struggling improved," Larson said.

Vireo Health is a group of scientists, physicians and healthcare professionals who work closely with the Office of Medical Cannabis. According to Kingsley, in Latin, Vireo means: "I am green. I am vigorous."

"Vireo Health hopes to redefine the medical cannabis industry via the insertion of standard medical, operational and scientific practices. The goal is to build a comprehensive model for medical cannabis that is accepted by mainstream medicine," Kingsely said.

There are ten conditions in which a person can receive medical Marijuana in Minnesota. They consist of the following: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Cancer/Cachexia, Crohn's Disease, Glaucoma, HIV/AIDS, Intractable Pain, Seizures, Severe and Persistent Muscle Spasms, Terminal Illness and Tourette's Syndrome.

Despite one's view on the matter, it is hard to dismiss the seemingly endless benefits of medical Marijuana.

Many prescription drugs are known to be dangerous. Opiates are among the leading causes of death in the US, and some drugs have killed tens of thousands of individuals.

According to Larson, as of February 18th, 2016, 1011 patients were able to pick up medical Marijuana in Minnesota. This resulted in a correlation of far fewer deaths from opiates. Both Larson and Kingsely strongly believe that medical Marijuana is a safer alternative to many prescription drugs.

"Personally, I hope to greatly reduce the utilization of opiates in the treatment of acute and chronic pain," Kingsely said.

The Minnesota Office of Medical Cannabis hopes to continue helping people. They have locations in Eden Prairie, Hibbing, Minneapolis, Moorehead, Rochester and Saint Cloud.

Unlike any other state with a medical Marijuana program, Minnesota tracks the experience of participants.

"I think that Minnesota's program is the best program from a Physician's perspective," Kingsely said.

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