

2/20/18

Simha Ravven, M.D.

Expansions of Qualifying conditions for Medical Marijuana. Commentary on S. 16

I am a psychiatrist and I have served on the Vermont Board of Medical Practice Medical Marijuana Appeals Board for three years. I am also the Senior Medical Director at the Brattleboro Retreat, and in clinical practice treat adults with a wide range of mental illness and substance use disorders. I also serve on the faculty at Yale Medical School in the Division of Law and Psychiatry.

I want to thank you for allowing me to comment on S. 16, An act relating to patient access to the Medical Marijuana Registry.

I would like to speak about proposed modifications for approved conditions for Medical Marijuana certification in Vermont.

The proposed changes to S.216 outlines broaden the definition of what conditions would qualify for a medical marijuana certificate. The proposed language reads, “other disease, condition, or treatment as determined in writing by a qualifying patient’s health care professional[.]”

In my opinion, to allow the certification of cannabis use at the broad discretion of the certifying clinician, as the above modification outlines, would be a mistake and would expose Vermonters to unnecessary risk of negative effects from cannabis without clear benefit. It is important that treatments are recommended by physicians only when we know that medical science supports the treatment for the patient’s condition. We know that the consequences of chronic cannabis exposure include tolerance, dependence, and withdrawal. Early and persistent marijuana use has been associated with increased risk of development of psychosis. Marijuana impairs attention, memory, IQ, and driving ability. To allow certification of cannabis use for conditions essentially at the discretion of the healthcare professional would expose Vermonters to potential risk and side effects of cannabis use without a reasonable expectation of benefit. It is important that Vermonters are protected from experimental treatments without clear benefit, but with known negative effects.

Medical marijuana use should be limited to those conditions where we have reasonable confidence that it will provide benefit and relief from symptoms.

I would like to thank the committee for hearing my thoughts and experiences.