

Change. Org update 18/08/17

This is not about medical Cannabis. It is about Political Cannabis!

In recent weeks several media stories have shone a light on the genuine struggle of patients to gain access to the medicine they have come to rely on.

The ABC Lateline program on 16th August received a strong response from the TGA who continue to miss the point about why patients are driven to seek media help to highlight the problems with the current TGA system.

In addition to desperate patients, doctors are complaining about red tape, but the TGA continues its arrogant stance. It ignores the real criticism and instead pats itself on the back by citing the number of approvals per year for other unregistered products.

Our Governments, at every level, have failed to produce policy that protects patients. They ignore the elephant in the room.....thousands of genuinely sick Australians who use cannabis as medicine and despite the fact that they have to navigate the black market and risk falling foul of the law, they do it anyway.... because it works!

What about recognising and responding to their needs?

TGA, you are not meeting the needs of these patients....if you were they would be under the legal cannabis system that you have claimed "does work efficiently to meet their needs". This is clear denial on your part.

TGA, you have been promising to make it easier for doctors since the inception of the program. How did you get it so wrong in the first place???.... let me take a stab at that one....you failed to ask patients what they needed, you failed to recognise the scaremongering during decades of prohibition, you say there is a lack of evidence (which is not true) as an excuse rather than recognising it for what it is.....a product of prohibition....not an indicator that cannabis is not of therapeutic value.

You take your advice from the peak bodies like the pain specialists who have vested interests in continuing to push opioids on the general public.... whether safe or not, you have failed to support and encourage those doctors, especially GPs who do wish to prescribe cannabis for their patients. You have failed to co-ordinate State and Territory health departments so we now have a mish mash of catch-22 and inconsistent regulations that add layers of bureaucracy and that operate in a vacuum, further adding additional hoops for sick folk to jump through. It's a disgrace!

In at least one state, individual Ministers behind closed doors and away from the cameras have encouraged bureaucrats to intentionally stifle progress. This has included cherry picking evidence which has been recognised internationally and producing less favorable domestic reviews by individuals who have background careers in studying the harms of cannabis. Additionally, protracted clinical trials with narrow scope and unfavorable requirements have been intentionally planned to be unpalatable and unattractive to patients. In other words, the medicinal cannabis scheme has been hijacked by those who want it to fail.

Add to that the lucrative deals that have been done by State Governments with companies such as GW Pharmaceuticals, which further limit the products available to the patients. The Government's clear preference for pharmaceuticalised cannabinoids is pushed rather than acknowledging patient preference for whole plant botanical products. This is not about meeting the needs of patients in any way.

This is about politicians taking accolades they don't deserve while they have made conscious efforts to mislead. Senior Ministers put themselves in front of cameras claiming to have recognised and responded compassionately toward the need in the community. Instead they have overseen the most cumbersome, disjointed, arrogant system possible. This is not about Medicinal Cannabis, this is about Political Cannabis!

At the 2017 UIC Medicinal Cannabis Symposium, Bill Turner from the Office of Drug Control said on the record that if a patient with a valid condition under Category B of the SAS, who had tried other treatments and they had a been using cannabis medically, that the TGA would accept their cannabis use as being relevant evidence....effectively an N=1 trial.

Do you stand by that TGA? Why do you not encourage N=1 trials? Why can doctors (including GPs) not put their needy patients onto personalised medicine trials where the patient can be monitored and supported, where the evidence can be built over time, where the safety of the patient is recognised in a practical way instead of the lip service the Government gives us now?

Currently, the Government is counting on busy doctors not being inclined to climb the mountain of paperwork for their patients. The head of the RACGP has thrown his hands in the air stating it is just too hard, with no consistency between the States and Territories adding to the difficulties of the Federal regulations. The Government is counting on the negativity from up high washing down and turning half-caring doctors into those that can't be bothered. Especially when the peak bodies are the enthusiastic mouthpieces of big pharma who wish cannabis stayed the long-lost victim of the Reefer Madness era.

I say to Minister Hunt and all State and Territory Health Ministers, Australia has a Government orchestrated problem. Here are a few examples:

When the Federal Health Minister's own office says that it has no desire to fix the problems with patient access because Labor and the Greens want to fix it.....When the TGA admits their website is set up to confuse.....When parents are too afraid to take their sick children to hospital....When hospitals call the police on families they have previously allowed to administer cannabis.....When the government-allowed imports are withheld from the terminally ill and so expensive few can afford them anyway.....and when a Government has set up a new potentially billion dollar industry to fail by restricting the patient access the whole system relies on.....We have a BIG problem!

Is there a politician in this country with the common sense and compassion to recognise and respond to the needs of the public? Evidence is building throughout the world. Stop exaggerating the harms, respond to the need, encourage education and research, but don't discount the human need and the genuine suffering that is all around us today.

Sick people vote too. A whisker slim majority and a bit of heart should give any career politician enough initiative to do something that is politically popular and offers genuine recognition of a desire to reduce suffering. Mr Turnbull, it is time you got interested and sorted this mess out.

<http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-16/medicinal-cannabis-red-tape-government-doctors-black-market/8813962?pfmredirect=sm>