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Professor Says Marijuana Should Not Be Legalized

Grass, pot, jive, mary jane, or Texas tea. By whatever name you know it, marijuana should not be legalized, claims Dr. Joseph Benforado, assistant clinical professor of medicine and a physician at the University of Wisconsin Health Center.

Marijuana must be considered a dangerous drug because doctors don't know enough about its long-term effects on the body and mind, Dr. Benforado says.

Many advocates of legalizing marijuana point out that overdoses of alcohol and nicotine can produce serious damage to the heart, lungs, or liver, whereas marijuana doesn't have such harmful effects.

Dr. Benforado, however, cautions that this may be because liquor and cigarettes have been in widespread use much longer than marijuana.

"How long does it take to make a chronic alcoholic?" he wonders. "Twenty years, maybe even 30? We may not know the long-range consequences of smoking marijuana until a generation from now."

Furthermore, while both alcohol and marijuana can induce mind alteration, only marijuana has the potential for producing hallucinations and psychosis. This attribute alone, Dr. Benforado believes, qualifies marijuana for dangerous drug status.

There is some evidence that sufficient doses of marijuana can produce psychological effects as pronounced as those caused by LSD. Most data

on marijuana use in the U.S. are based on the least potent preparations of the drug, Dr. Benforado notes. More potent forms, such as hashish, may have a severe psychological effect.

Hoping to glimpse the medical future of marijuana smokers in the U.S., the National Institutes of Health is initiating a study in Morocco, where use of the drug has been commonplace for years. Until such studies are completed, however, medical and psychiatric reports on marijuana will contain many question marks.

Another deterrent to study of marijuana has been the lack of a standard for research purposes. To conduct a meaningful investigation, a researcher must have a sample with known potency and chemical makeup.

Often, the only source available to scientists has been marijuana seized by the authorities. This material is often mixed with other plants and chemicals, making it difficult to reproduce results. Even if the substance is "pure" marijuana, its potency may vary according to where the plant was grown, how it was cultivated, and how long it was stored.

This problem was solved by the development of a way to synthesize the active ingredient in marijuana, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). Laboratory synthesis of THC gave scientists a standard with which to study marijuana's mode of action.

Although a boon to medical scien-

tists, THC proved to be a headache to law enforcement officials. Existing Wisconsin laws didn't cover the synthetic substance, so when Madison police confiscated \$20,000 worth of the chemical in 1968, the possessor got off scot-free.

This legal loophole has been plugged by a revised drug law, passed by the Wisconsin legislature on January 14. The Advisory Committee on Drug Abuse, of which Dr. Benforado is chairman, was instrumental in the revision of the drug legislation.

The new law reclassifies marijuana as a "dangerous drug" not a narcotic. "Marijuana doesn't do what narcotics do," Dr. Benforado explains.

"A narcotic is a substance that affects the nervous system to produce sleep or relieve pain. Morphine acts in this way, but not marijuana. There was a discrepancy between the legal and medical definitions of marijuana, and the committee thought that the law should reflect scientific knowledge."

The law also reduces the penalty for possession or use of marijuana from a felony to a misdemeanor and provides that first-time offenders who plead guilty or are found guilty of smoking marijuana may be released on probation. If the offender com-

pletes his probation period, the conviction may be erased from his record. On the other hand, penalties for the sale of marijuana are stiffer.

The legislation is a relatively innovative legal change, Dr. Benforado says. Most other states still classify marijuana as a narcotic, and impose rather harsh fines and sentences for first offenses.

Dr. Benforado regards the law as a "more rational approach to drug laws," for it is consistent with present scientific knowledge.

'Water Resources of Iowa' Publication Now Available

A special printing of *Water Resources of Iowa*, planned and edited by Paul Horick, Ground-Water geologist at the Iowa Geological Survey, is now available.

The publication is a collection of eleven papers given at a symposium in the geology section of the Iowa Academy of Science at the University of Northern Iowa April 18, 1969.

It can be obtained by sending \$1.00 to the Iowa Academy of Science, Inc., The University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613.