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In the June 12 SC Democratic Primary, voters were asked if they support a state law allowing doctors to prescribe “medical marijuana” to patients. This issue has been debated nationally and in South Carolina for several years and during this past SC legislative session, there were two bills to legalize “medical marijuana” that garnered some movement, but did not make a full vote by either the House or Senate.

They could come up for votes next session. There are many issues with the bills in both the House and Senate and the question on the ballot that was misleading.

Among them: “Prescribing”: Doctors cannot prescribe marijuana/cannabis. There is no prescription, only a recommendation. There is no method to pick up a measured amount with dosing instructions from a pharmacy / pharmacist. CVS, Walgreens or any other local pharmacy are prohibited from carrying a Schedule I drug (heroin, LSD, marijuana, ecstasy) in pharmacies. The treating physician will not know how much marijuana you will need to treat your condition and instead will have to instruct you to “experiment” to see which strain of marijuana may be effective and how much to take. This does not occur with other medicines prescribed by physicians.

“Medical” Marijuana: Marijuana (cannabis) is not approved as medicine. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), Omeprazole (Prilosec), antibiotics, etc. for both over the counter and prescription medicines are approved by the FDA and regulated. This means there is accountability for prescribing, purchasing and regulation of ingredients for these medications. “Medical marijuana” would be under the regulation of DHEC, which currently does not regulate medications for the state and has no experience in this area. Latest news by email The afternoon's latest local news

Also, if approved, “Pot Shops/Dispensaries” would come to our community to sell marijuana in leaf form, edibles to include laced gummy bears, brownies, drinks, etc. and our county would not be able to disallow their presence. It should be noted in Colorado only 25 of 64 counties allow pot to be sold. So when you hear how successful and well-received the marijuana industry is, understand that the majority of the counties have banned it because they know the deleterious effects the industry has on their community. These dispensaries would also carry pipes, bongs, “one hitters” and other paraphernalia.

In states where “medical marijuana” has been legalized, there has been a marked increase in emergency room visits by children who’ve eaten a marijuana laced brownie, cookie or gummy bear. In addition, a recent study published by the non-profit group Smart Approaches to Marijuana indicated dispensary workers were recommending marijuana to pregnant women as a way to reduce morning sickness which could put the unborn child at risk.

There are currently FDA approved medications available in South Carolina (Marinol, Cesamet and Syndros). Those medications can be accessed by a patient through the FDA Expanded Access programs with 99 percent of applicants being approved. In addition, the FDA will soon be approving a new cannabis based drug called Epidiolex as it has gone through the rigors of FDA testing and clinical trials

and there will be a consistent measured dose. Epidiolex will be used to help those with seizure disorders.

CBD Oil is also approved and available for use in SC, however it is not being well regulated and purchasers have no way of verifying products' ingredients or THC (the mind altering part of marijuana). The S.C. Legislature just approved the additional research of "medical marijuana" as it relates to helping relieve symptoms of those with health issues.

The very fact that they approved this research is indicative that there is not enough valid information, including controlled double-blind clinical trials, to demonstrate it is safe and effective.

As a provider of alcohol and other drug treatment in York County, we know that as drugs become legalized, even if for medicinal purposes, the perceived risk goes down and therefore use goes up, especially by youth whose brains are still developing. Recently, a Monitoring the Future survey conducted by the University of Michigan demonstrated that high school students indicated they would be more likely to smoke marijuana if it were legalized.

Educate yourself about what legalization of "medical marijuana" will mean for your family, our community and our state. For more information on the facts about marijuana, visit TheBluntTruthSC.com.

If you or your loved one needs help in dealing with a substance abuse issue, visit keystoneyork.org.

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