

Marijuana: The Facts

Over the last several years many states have taken steps in decriminalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes. In 2012, both Washington state and Colorado became the first states to decriminalize marijuana for recreational use. As drug court practitioners, it is important to be current on the facts surrounding marijuana use and how these changes in state laws might effect your participants.

Regardless of the legal status of marijuana use/possession, drug court practitioners do not have to authorize its use. The courts have recognized restrictions on the use of legal intoxicating substances such as alcohol as conditions of drug court participation. As for questions to drug court from participants, personnel armed with facts can address any inquiries that arise. Through scientific research, studies have proven that marijuana is physiologically and psychologically addictive. Marijuana has a dependence liability of 8-10%. This means that 1 out of every 10 to 12 people who use marijuana *will become addicted to the drug*. Additionally, the dependence liability increases with more frequent usage.

The telltale feature of physical addiction is when uncomfortable or painful withdrawal symptoms occur as levels of the substance decline in a person's bloodstream. Studies have proven that marijuana addiction is associated with a clinically significant withdrawal syndrome. Addicts who stop can experience irritability, anger, cravings, decreased appetite, insomnia, headaches and fatigue.

The second feature of addiction is psychological dysfunction resulting from repeated use. Common symptoms include persistent procrastination, low productivity, memory problems and interpersonal conflicts.

The physical effects of chronic marijuana use can include chronic bronchitis, coughing daily, wheezing, abnormal chest sounds and phlegm. Marijuana has negative effects on cognitive functioning such as memory, learning and motor coordination.

.....continued next column.

"Change your thoughts and you change your world."—

Norman Vincent Peale



As with most drugs, marijuana's negative health effects tend to be more pronounced in elderly persons, individuals with chronic medical illnesses and those with compromised immune systems. It makes little sense then that proponents of medicinal use focus on people in these target groups as those who can benefit from marijuana use. The National Institutes of Health estimate that a person who smokes five marijuana cigarettes per week is inhaling as many cancer causing chemicals as one who smokes one pack of cigarettes daily. A person's risk of a heart attack is four times greater during the first hour after smoking marijuana. Adding to misconceptions, proponents of the medicinal uses of marijuana focus on the benefits of smoking the drug, when in actuality, research indicates that the oral THC in the correct dose is as effective as smoked marijuana in achieving therapeutic effects. The only evidence favoring smoked marijuana over the oral THC tablets is anecdotal testimony.

— *The Facts on Marijuana*, by Douglas B. Marlowe, J.D., Ph.D., December 2010

1 out of every 10 to 12 people who use marijuana will become addicted to the drug

Synthetic Marijuana Data Reported

Over 11,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms after using synthetic marijuana in 2010 according to a report from the Drug Abuse Warning Network. The report is the first to emerge that presents negative health effects relating to synthetic marijuana products.

Synthetic marijuana is a mixture of herbs and plant material that is coated with a chemical compound similar to THC. Manufacturers then market the products in plastic baggies as incense. Buyers then smoke the product like a marijuana cigarette.

Physical side effects reported from use include loss of control, lack of pain response, increased agitation, pale skin, seizures, vomiting, profuse sweating, uncontrolled body movements, elevated blood pressure and heart rate. Users may also experience severe paranoia, delusions and hallucinations. Gil Kerlikowske, Office of National Drug Control Policy Director stated that the report "confirms that synthetic drugs cause substantial damage to public health and safety."

Synthetic marijuana and other synthetic drugs were banned in July 2012 by the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act.

— Donna Leinwand Leger, *USA Today: Synthetic Marijuana Impact Report*, December 4, 2012.

Synthetic Marijuana Sent Over 11,000 People to Hospitals in 2010

Bath Salts Report from Maine

Maine officials report that four cases of serious infections are the result of individuals injecting the synthetic drug commonly known as "bath salts." *The Portland Daily Sun* reports that four patients were hospitalized for invasive "Group A" streptococcal infections. Two of the patients developed Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome, which can lead to blood pressure drops and organ failure. One of the four patients developed necrotizing fasciitis, a "flesh eating" disease that quickly destroys muscle, fat and skin tissues.

— *The Portland Daily Sun*, December 13, 2012.

"It can be very dangerous because it can cause infections of your heart and infections of your bloodstream," said Dr. Sheila G. Pinette, Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. **"Our major concern is to try and discourage this type of drug use."**

— Dr. Sheila G. Pinette speaking about infections from bath salt use

"...synthetic drugs cause substantial damage to public health and safety."

— Gil Kerlikowske, Office of National Drug Control Policy Director

SAVE THE DATE.....SAVE THE DATE.....SAVE THE DATE.....

2013 ANNUAL STATE DRUG COURT CONFERENCE

APRIL 18TH AND 19TH

LOCAL DRUG COURT NEWS

Sebastian County Drug Court celebrated their 10 year anniversary on December 7th, 2012 with a large scale graduation and awards ceremony. Twenty-four drug court clients graduated from the program during the celebration and gratitude themed ceremony.

Several hundred people gathered at the ceremony, with many of the graduates expressing their heartfelt thanks to the drug court program for helping them to change their lives.

Ms. Taylor, a keynote speaker, said she joined the program after suffering 27 years of drug abuse. "You get tired of being sick and tired," Taylor said, recalling how she had been wanting to stop using methamphetamine but could not on her own. "I kept calling out to God, and he didn't show up.... And then God showed up...as the 12th District Drug Task Force." After her arrest, she began drug court. Taylor later remarked that the day she started the program was the best day of her life.



Sebastian County Drug Court Judge J. Michael Fitzhugh presents a certificate and gifts to a graduating participant.



Breaking Up with Bad Habits

People, Places and Things.....Every habit-forming activity follows the same behavioral and neurological patterns, says New York Times business writer Charles Duhigg. His new book *The Power of Habit* explores the science behind why we do what we do.

Duhigg explains that every habit starts with a psychological pattern called a "habit loop," which is a three-part process. First, the cue or trigger, which tells your brain to go into automatic mode and let behavior happen. "Then there's the routine, which is the behavior itself," Duhigg tells *Fresh Air's* Terry Gross. "That's what we think about when we think about habits." The third step, he says, is the reward: something that your brain likes that helps it remember the "habit loop" in the future. As soon as a behavior becomes automatic, the decision-making part of your brain goes into a sleep mode of sorts. That is what makes it easy for people to do multiple tasks at a time.

Studies have shown that people will perform automated behaviors the same way every single time, if they are in the same environment. But if they change the environment, it is likely that the behavior will change.

"It's also a great reason why changing a habit on vacation is one of the proven most-successful ways to do it," he says. "If you want to quit smoking, you should stop smoking while you're on a vacation—because all your old cues and all your old rewards aren't there anymore. So you have this ability to form a new pattern and hopefully be able to carry it over into your life."

— Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, 2012 interview with author Charles Duhigg on his book *The Power of Habit*.

Justice Building, 625 Marshall
Street
Little Rock, AR 72201

Phone: 501-682-9400

E-mail: kari.powers@arkansas.gov

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webinars and Resources

*****NEW**** American University Drug Court
Practitioner Webinars at:

<http://www1.spa.american.edu/justice/videos.php>



“Translating Drug Court Research into
Practice” at:

<http://research2practice.org/>

NDCI’s “Tune In Tuesdays” Webinar series:

[http://www.ndci.org/training/online-trainings-webinars/
webinars](http://www.ndci.org/training/online-trainings-webinars/webinars)

And other useful links.....

<http://www.courtinnovation.org/topic/drug-court>

www.drugfree.org

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Contributions, comments and inquiries are welcome. Please submit to:

The Line, AOC

Justice Building, 625 Marshall Street

Little Rock, AR 72201

Telephone: (501) 682-9400

Kari E. Powers, Editor

kari.powers@arkansas.gov