

Marijuana as **harm reduction**: Practice grounded in **science**, compassion, health and human rights.

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Today's talk

- Some principles of harm reduction
- Introducing our Endocannabinoid System (ECS)
- How marijuana works as an alternative
- Implications for prescription drug overdose and practice

Some Principles of Harm Reduction

- Understands drug use as complex & encompassing a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence.
- Establishes quality of individual and community life as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.
- Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm.

The Endocannabinoid System (ECS)

Humans, and all animals make and use internally produced cannabis-like products to regulate all body systems.

Within a cell, cannabinoids control basic metabolic processes such as glucose metabolism . . . In general cannabinoids modulate and coordinate tissues, organs and body systems.

– Dr. Robert Melamede, Harm Reduction Journal, 2005

The Endocannabinoid System (ECS)

- A system in the making for 600 million years
- Discovered in the 1990 by Israeli scientists
- Cannabinoid receptors are primarily found on cell in our
 - Brain
 - Gut
 - Peripheral nervous system

Marijuana As Harm Reduction

- Helps with physical symptoms of chemical withdrawal that make people prone to relapse.
- Pre-clinical animal studies have shown that cannabinoids have ability to dampen receptor signal for craving
- Opiates and other prescription drugs often have more harsh side effects.

Implications for prescription drug overdose

- New Mexico has consistently ranked #1 or #2 for overdose deaths in the country
- Marijuana has been shown to have fewer adverse side effects, to provide better symptom management, and to have less withdrawal potential (Berkeley Patient Group study)
- Increases the efficacy of opiates without increasing the dose (see Ware; Abrams)
- Risks of overdose and dependence is less than with other drugs.
- Prescription medications have negative impacts on liver functioning
- Many patients claim it simply “works better”.

Thank you!

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