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Statement on the Use of Medical Marijuana

There is ongoing debate regarding the potential benefits of the use of cannabis (marijuana) for medical purposes in the U.S. A dearth of quality research and lack of expert consensus precludes making evidence based recommendations for clinical use. ASPMN® recognizes some patients use marijuana as a pain management strategy. ASPMN® also acknowledges there may be certain situations in certain patients that thoughtful use of medical marijuana may be appropriate. In light of this, all nurses must have knowledge of and understand the medical use of marijuana just as they do with any medication or treatment. Nurses should be familiar with conditions for which marijuana and cannabinoids may be beneficial (cancer associated nausea, vomiting, HIV cachexia and wasting, spasticity in spinal conditions, MS, glaucoma, and “compassionate use” in children with debilitating or life limiting conditions), potential interactions with other medications, and risks and benefits of use. It is imperative nurses also provide education to patients regarding the benefits and risks of marijuana use, including potential abuse and diversion, and neurological impact of marijuana on brain function.

Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) must comply with statutory and regulatory requirements with the states in which they are licensed and APRN’s working in federal institutions, such as the VA, must be aware that federal law prohibits the prescribing of marijuana. However APRNs with DEA licensure can prescribe FDA approved cannabinoid medications such as dronabinol and nabilone.

ASPMN acknowledges while there are some data showing efficacy in certain situations there is an overwhelming need for further research. We support the recommendations of several professional organizations (American College of Physicians, American Medical Association, and the Institute of Medicine) for the creation of a research grade cannabis and rescheduling (from C-I to C-II) of marijuana to allow appropriate and quality research. ASPMN also supports the American Academy of Pediatrics’ opposition to the legalization of marijuana, due to the potential harms to children and adolescents. ASPMN agrees with the American College of Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics call to decriminalize marijuana in conjunction with efforts to prevent marijuana use and promote early treatment of adolescents with marijuana use problems. With regard to the use of medical marijuana, ASPMN® strongly believes that ALL health care providers should advocate for continued research to establish a base of evidence for practice while being sensitive to the need for compassionate care use in unique medical conditions.