

BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Marihuana and Medicine*

REFERENCE: Nahas GG, Sutin KM, Harvey DJ, Agurell S, editors, *Marihuana and Medicine*, Humana Press, Totowa, New Jersey, 1999, 826 pp., \$125.

For many people, marihuana is probably an anecdotal, and illegal, presumed therapy for far-ranging health problems, possibly including: glaucoma, vomiting, nausea, loss of appetite, spasticity and chronic pain of known or idiopathic origin. Regrettably, with respect to many areas of potential clinical efficacy and safety of marihuana, in medicine, rigorously-obtained data are highly limited, or maybe not available at all. Numerous important questions of professional and research interest to clinicians and researchers abound. For instance, does marihuana have therapeutic properties? If so, what is the molecular basis for any such properties? If marihuana is therapeutically inadequate, what is the correct molecular explanation for the inadequacy? Further, can possible therapeutic properties of marihuana be dissociated effectually from myriad, untoward side effects?

Marihuana and Medicine is a monograph comprised of a great many contributions culled from a Symposium held at the New York University School of Medicine, in March 1998, as well as papers reprinted from various sources. The editors have admirably garnered contributions from a rich wealth of scholars. The volume makes it plain that the science of marihuana, despite considerable progress, remains substantially limited and incomplete.

The monograph is a veritable compendium of knowledge of potential professional interest to medical clinicians with interests in the following areas: glaucoma, the nervous system, psychiatry, AIDS, and the treatment of pain. It cannot be gainsaid that a reading of the volume will assist many clinicians with respect to making decisions pertaining to the possible therapeutic efficacy of marihuana.

Moreover, the monograph contains an abundant wealth of data and information of interest to cannabinoid researchers. The editors present information on the chemistry, biochemistry, pharmacology, physiopathology, pharmacokinetics and molecular mechanisms of marihuana. The scholarly value of the information presented is buttressed by multitudinous references.

There are disparate views in the biomedical community regarding the use of marihuana in medicine. The plethora of review materials and scientific data presented in this fine volume may mitigate the disparity of views. The monograph, withal, clearly points to the salient need for undertaking further scientific investigation of marihuana, including: clinical studies, systematic epidemiological studies, basic laboratory investigations, and experimental studies. There simply is a great scientific need for more basic, clinical and epidemiological data. Moreover, *Marihuana and Medicine* drives home the point that there should certainly be continued scientific investigation of possible therapeutic mechanisms of action of marihuana in humans.

It is important for prospective readers to understand what *Marihuana and Medicine* is, and what it is not. Many members of the general public, as well as many health policy makers, are probably incompletely informed, or ill-informed, about marihuana. Frankly, this volume does little to mitigate such a knowledge gap. To fully appreciate the scholarly value of the information presented, a reader will need to have a solid background in science; a fairly recondit knowledge of scientific aspects of marihuana is particularly helpful. A ramification of the highly didactic nature of the book is that it doesn't really bridge the chasm separating cannabinoid researchers and health policy makers.

This monograph is most highly recommended to medical clinicians and researchers with a professional interest in marihuana and medicine.