

Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Russell Kamer. I am a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine at New York Medical College, and I am a practicing primary care physician.

I am here representing Smart Approaches to Marijuana, or SAM NY, a group that favors a smart approach-decriminalization of marijuana/social justice reforms but opposes legalization and commercial sales of recreational marijuana.

Today, I see us going down the same path that we did 20 years ago when the opioid epidemic was starting. Well intentioned people (along with a drug industry intent on maximizing profit) advised prescribing opioids to eradicate pain. Today, again, we have a billion dollar drug industry, but we also have well intentioned people who want to promote commercial sales of recreational marijuana. I say “slow down.” I don’t want to see history repeat itself.

Today’s marijuana is not your old Woodstock weed. THC levels can be 50 times stronger than in the past. THC is not a harmless substance. It accumulates in the brain causing many problems from learning and memory problems to psychosis - every major medical group opposes or has serious reservations about legalizing pot.

What has the experience been with legalization in Colorado? Let me tell you about Pueblo Colorado- sometimes called the Napa Valley of Cannabis. My colleague Dr Karen Randall directs an Emergency Room there. Every day she sees patients suffering from the effects of THC—and I say thc because it’s not just marijuana leaf, people use thc concentrates - oils, wax, shatter up approaching 100% thc-very strong-nothing like the weak weed people my age remember. She sees cannabis induced psychosis -last week she treated a 13 yo with a psychotic break from THC. There are child poisonings from thc candies.

There are even diseases that didn’t exist when I was in medical school. Cannabis hyperemesis syndrome- a severe vomiting disorder is common, causing visits to ER every day. Hard to treat.

I didn’t believe all this when I first heard of it a few years ago, but it is common. Dr. Randall has noticed major strains on the system. So, if you are going to put marijuana in the budget, you need to write it in red ink. Marijuana is a net negative. And that’s just the financial cost. That doesn’t include the human cost, for example, of drugged driving. Marijuana-related fatalities are up in legal states - in some places they’ve more than doubled — and stoned driving is hard to detect and prove. There is no test like breathalyzers for alcohol that is accepted as proof of impairment. These are just a few problems with increasing use of marijuana.

Now Is not the time for promoting another addiction for profit industry. Slow down, truly decriminalize, but don’t create Big Tobacco or Big Pharma 2.0.