

Translated from *Rev Prescrire* July 2010; 30 (321): 481

Personalised service

In France, as in many other countries, large numbers of adolescents and adults use cannabis. Cannabis now ranks alongside tobacco and alcohol as one of the psychoactive products frequently used in early adulthood.

Because of their notorious harmful effects, tobacco and alcohol consumption are regularly targeted in public health campaigns. Unlike cannabis, tobacco and alcohol are both legally consumed by adults, and their use by adolescents is often tolerated.

Regardless of the reasons why people use cannabis, its consumption is prohibited by law in France, making information on its adverse effects a controversial matter. Some sectors of society seek to exaggerate the adverse effects of cannabis in order to justify its prohibition, while others tend to stress the harmful consequences of its prohibition, while minimising or simply ignoring its negative effects on health.

It is important to obtain and share reliable information on the adverse effects of any widely consumed product. But how to provide objective information on cannabis to an adolescent who has never “tried” it; to worried parents; to a middle-aged user who wonders about the health effects of long-term cannabis consumption; or to a cannabis user who is “dependent” on several other substances?

It is crucial to examine existing data with a critical and unbiased mind; to assess the level of evidence; to examine the relevance of the criteria used; to search for confounding factors; to determine the degree of uncertainty; and to work as a part of team in order to reduce prejudices and avoid narrow-mindedness. These are the principles on which *Prescrire* bases all its reviews of the literature.

This impartial and in-depth analysis (see page 18 of this issue) can then form the basis for reliable and trustworthy information of practical value for all those concerned, free of moral judgement. It is not reasonable either to demonise cannabis or to ignore its harmful effects for some individuals.

Healthcare professionals have a duty to provide personalised service, treating patients as individuals, in their specific context, while respecting their freedom to choose; including the choice to indulge in risk-taking behaviours.

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