P.S. to the NEWS

by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002
Phone: 618-462-5415

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NEW EVIDENCE ON MARIJUANA

The "trivialization of marijuana" is one of the major problems in curbing drug abuse, according to a panel of five experts who held a news conference recently in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Citizens for Informed Choices on Marijuana (CICOM). Far from being harmless, it is a very dangerous drug which can cause severe physical and psychological damage.

The problem of drug-peddling to schoolchildren is matched today by the problem of marijuana effects on unborn and nursing babies. Mothers, particularly those who breast-feed, expose their babies to components of marijuana which affect the central nervous system, according to Dr. Carlton E. Turner, Associate Director of the Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences, of the University of Mississippi. These components, called cannabinoids, are transfered to the fetus through the placenta and also are stored in mothers' milk, he said.

"Loving parents are just not enough to protect children today from the innovations, the marketing techniques, the propaganda and the greed of the multi-billion dollar illicit drug business," declared Mrs. Joyce Nalepka of Silver Spring, Maryland, one of the experts participating in the news conference. The coordinator for the Coalition for Concern About Drug Use in Youth, she presented a display of drug-related paraphernalia designed by pushers to induce children to use marijuana.

Another expert on marijuana effects on youth, Dr. Ingrid Lantner, described symptoms of marijuana use as "amotivation, tiredness, decreasing grades in school, paranoid thinking, changes in eating and sleeping habits, coughing, chest pains, absense of menstrual periods, changes in human interactions, and depression." A pediatrician, Dr. Lantner has observed children as young as six and seven years old using the drug. Decreasing short-term memory is one of its most striking symptoms.

Chronic marijuana use affects memory, judgment, motivation, perception and cognition, according to Dr. Harold M. Voth, senior psychiatrist and psychoanalyst at the

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Menninger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas. Typical results of heavy usage include deterioration of personality and of goal orientation, he said.

Dr. Voth pointed out that school teachers find marijuana-using students less attentive, less motivated, less participative and under-performing. The use of marijuana by younger and younger children is becoming a major national health problem.

A grand jury in Essex County, New Jersey, found during two months of hearings that drug abuse in schools is epidemic, even among eight- and nine-year-olds. According to Richard M. Roberts, Assistant County Prosecutor, marijuana was the most used of the drugs, and it contributes significantly to lower learning skills, school crime and vandalism, and a huge loss to the community in human potential.

After outlining its medical and scientific findings, the Citizens for Informed Choices on Marijuana made public an action program it has sent to President Carter and to federal drug-abuse authorities. CICOM called on the President to "assume leadership in the growing nationwide effort to curb the use of marijuana, particularly among children."

CICOM asked the President to take such specific steps as to "make a clear, unequivocal statement of the dangers of marijuna use" summarizing the latest scientific and medical findings, and warning against the increasing trend toward use by younger and younger children. CICOM also urged that the President eliminate all obsolete and inaccurate material portraying marijuana as a harmless drug. Government agencies should not use or recommend such materials.

Among the new scientific materials giving the latest scientific information on marijuana, CICOM recommends that government agencies promote and distribute the transcripts of papers presented at the International Symposium on Marijuana in Rheims, Framce, in July 1978. Many of these papers are publicly available in a new volume called "Marijuana: Biological Effects," edited by Dr. Gabriel G. Nahas of Columbia Unversity and Dr. W. D. M. Paton of Oxford University. This book has been called "a milestone in the path to knowledge about marijuana."

Dr. R. G. Heath, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine, has said that marijuana users "now comprise the largest single category of the mentally ill." CICOM is filling an urgent need in our society.

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