P.S. to the NEWS
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THE EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA

Harold M. Voth, M.D., senior psychiatrist and psychoanalyst at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, recently released to the general public some of his findings about his patients who smoke marijuana. He has concluded that "marijuana is a harmful substance and that continuous usage has harmful psychic effects and eventually produces profound personality changes."

Dr. Voth asked many high school teachers a simple question: "Can you tell when one of your students is smoking marijuana, and will you describe its effects?" The teachers' initial response was one of surprise and disbelief that there might be any doubt about their answer.

All those interviewed responded affirmatively. Students who smoke marijuana typically become less attentive, they lose their motivation to learn and participate meaningfully in class, their performance begins to slip, and some eventually drop out of school altogether.

The teachers spontaneously embellished their comments by a few examples of bright, involved young persons who eventually became completely "lost." Comments were: "It was tragic to see this happen, but what could I do? Someone should have intervened."

"Most of my psychiatrist colleagues," Dr. Voth says, believe that chronic use of marijuana is harmful. These men have both inpatient and outpatient services. Of course, how harmful varies greatly according to the basic ego strength of the individual, and the quantity and strength of the drug. Practically all, however, agree that the psychological effects range from negative to very harmful.

Dr. Voth described as "shocking and heartbreaking" the changes he has observed in young people he has personally known for years. The typical picture is that of a young person "full of vitality, socially involved and steadily climbing in his advance through life ... goal-directed and making good grades."

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After they started smoking marijuana, "their personalities began to change and their life adjustments deteriorated. Their appearances changed. Another brilliant young man has been unable to come even close to realizing his potential."

Perhaps one of the reasons why Dr. Voth's conclusions, and similar findings of other physicians, psychiatrists and scientists, are so vehemently denounced by marijuana users is that they are unaware of the effects on themselves. Personality changes are slow and insidious. Chronic use hooks the user into a lifestyle which is extremely hard to break.

The effects of chronic use are lack of motivation, inability to concentrate, and difficulty directing attention. Dr. Voth concludes that chronic marijuana use "affects memory, judgment, motivation, perception, and cognition. In addition, the drug causes an overall deterioration of personality; it leads to an estrangement from the mainstream of life; it lowers performance in all areas; and it leads to a social phenomenon in which users bond together into both loose or tightly bound subsocial groups. The effects on the user's family life are frequently devastating."

Dr. Voth discusses the extremely difficult task of trying to cure the chronic marijuana user, as aspect which provides further evidence of the far-reaching effects of the drug. "The inability of the user to perceive himself or to gain insight into what has happened to him over time is one of the truly pernicious and remarkable aspects of the effects of the drug."

He says there is only one certain way to be cured from marijuana smoking: to be totally isolated from the drug for a minimum of three months. It takes that long for the user to become aware of the profund effects the drug has had on him and to <u>want</u> to free himself from marijuana.

Dr. Voth's experience is that "talking rarely works." It takes forthright decisive action "by someone willing and able to take responsibility for the fate of the user." The chronic and probably even the moderate user simply cannot take that responsibility for himself. "Someone who cares must intervene, totally, consistently and with unrelenting perseverance [because] efforts short of an all-out effort generally fail."

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