

October 24, 1969

Editor
New York Times
New York, New York

Dear Sir:

The recent change in the Federal Government's position regarding penalties for possession of marijuana is indeed salutary. But your support of the Administration's change in position was combined with support for another commission to study marijuana - the bill suggested by Senator Moss and Congressman Koch. Such a commission is unnecessary and wasteful of funds; it can serve only to delay the research efforts which already have been stimulated by the National Institute of Mental Health, but which remain unfunded.

There have been many studies of the "marijuana problem" - beginning with the Indian Commission in the last century up to the extensive English Marijuana Commission Report of 1968. Each commission finds we lack facts regarding the effects of short term and long term use of cannabis. Is cannabis addictive? Does it lead to use and addiction of opiates? Does cannabis use lead to permanent brain damage?

In 1965, NIMH arranged a meeting of scientists to elicit and stimulate proposals to answer these questions. Many of the recommendations have already been implemented and studies are in progress. The recommendations included the development of defined strains of cannabis with high content of some of the presumed active components of cannabis, such as the tetrahydrocannabinols. Projects to provide rapid assays for the components of cannabis, and animal studies to determine the long term toxic effects have been proposed. Studies have been elicited to measure the effects of acute and chronic smoking of cannabis on perception, mood, affect and driving. Some proposals have been elicited to study the sociology of cannabis use, including patterns of contagiousness. Proposals have not been limited to studies in the U.S., for scientists have suggested investigations in areas like the Near East, where cannabis use has been long standing and more socially acceptable, to determine the incidence and severity of chronic brain syndromes or other toxic effects.

We have recently been advised that many proposals may not be funded because of limitations in the contract funds of NIMH. Considering the number of scientists NIMH has been able to stimulate to look at the marijuana problem, the need seems more for additional funds to allow scientists, grantees and contractors of NIMH to carry out studies already approved by expert committees which remain unfunded. Surely, this is a more worthwhile approach than the allocation of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars once again to decide what should be studied.

Sincerely yours,

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