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## Medical marijuana treats card holders

*People with range of medical conditions appreciate services that medical marijuana dispensaries provide*

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Journal/Sam Green

Travis Pollock packages some medicine for Dave Mullane at Nature's Own Wellness Center in Cortez. People with a range of medical conditions say medical marijuana dispensaries have helped reduce symptoms and pain.

David Mullane had never tried cannabis until three months ago, when he read about a new medical marijuana dispensary opening in Cortez.

He decided to give it a try to ease the side effects of the medication - including Methadone - that he took every day to treat his cerebral palsy.

"I was sick, throwing up all the time and couldn't sleep or eat. I read about (the medical marijuana dispensary) Nature's Own and I was inspired by Travis' words," Mullane said, referring to the medical marijuana dispensary's owner, Travis Pollock. "So here I am, so much better."

Mullane, 40, has had 26 surgeries since being diagnosed with cerebral palsy at age 5.

"I've had every kind of pain surgery there is," he said.

Since the Cortez resident began incorporating medical marijuana into his daily regimen, he was able to reduce his pharmaceutical intake by half, which has given him a new lease on life, he said.

"I can go out in the yard and play with my kids now," he said. "My blood pressure and thyroid have leveled off, and I can sleep through the night without being woken by muscle spasm pain."

Mullane said he applies a cream made of coconut oil and cannabis that he rubs "from my heels to the top of my neck" and attributes his improved liver function to medical marijuana.

"Two years ago they said I had 10 years to live, but my latest liver test was almost normal," he said. "If they take my marijuana away from me, they are giving me a death sentence."

Another patient at Nature's Own Wellness Center, Robert Lujan, used to buy his marijuana off the street to treat the pain for his Becker's muscular dystrophy, characterized by slowly progressive muscle weakness of the legs and pelvis.

Lujan, who requires a cane to walk, said he has been smoking for 15 years, starting in his late teens. He was glad to get the medical marijuana card so he could purchase the medicine legally and from a trusted, consistent source.

"I decided I would drop the \$90 to stay out of jail. It's my get-out-of-jail-free card," he said. "It's also a little more affordable and in a controlled environment. It's safe. I'm not going to get burned, and I know exactly what I'm getting."

Lujan said he takes medical marijuana in addition to pharmaceutical medication.

"It's not all about people getting high. It's to manage the pain," he said. "With cannabis I can stay aware and function instead of being all doped up.

"I don't know why people have a problem with it. I don't judge people who buy a 12-pack every day."

Joe Leininger of Mancos moved to Colorado from Illinois a year ago and set out immediately to get a card to treat the chronic pain from a herniated disk that had to be removed in his neck, replaced with a titanium plate. Uninsured, before Medicaid picked him up, the 39-year-old initially had to pay \$700 a month out-of-pocket for prescribed medication, which included Fentanyl patches, Percocet, muscle relaxers, and antidepressants so he could sleep at night.

Leininger said that because of the better quality of marijuana, he now is able to rely entirely on cannabis to relieve his pain.

"Since it was legal to use the medicine, it made it available so I could have more access to it. Otherwise, you're on the street looking for what you could find and it's not as good quality, quantity or pricewise. Now I go to the dispensary once or twice a month to get medicine."

Lea Cano, 83, takes medical marijuana for her arthritis, which she has had as a teenager, and glaucoma.

Cano, of Dolores, switched from a Durango dispensary to the closer Herbal Alternative in Cortez when it opened in October 2009.

"It's been the best thing that ever happened to me as far as my health, general piece of mind and attitude," she said of the availability of medical marijuana. "I haven't had to be on any kind of prescription types of drugs such as Vicodin or tranquilizers. Marijuana is beneficial - it's an herb. It's been around for many, many years and it's used for many things."

Cano said after opening a chain of Mexican restaurants in southern California called El Torrito, she spent 15 years in Mexico, where she first became acquainted with marijuana in her early 50s.

"I was becoming an alcoholic and smoking cigarettes when the boat captain asked, 'What do you know about grass?' Being stupid and always having had gardeners, I said I knew you had to have it manicured."

Cano said he rolled some joints and gave her one, and she quit cigarettes and alcohol on the spot.

Cano said legalizing medical marijuana has helped take away money put toward an illegal drug trade from the Mexican cartels.

"I've seen how they grow that stuff down there: They urinate on it. It's dirty. It has seeds. And Christ only knows what all they bring across the border - not to mention the other stuff," she said. "I have always believed that the goody two shoes that do their sinning behind closed doors who don't want it, they're whistling up the wrong tree. Marijuana is not going away."

Cano said she would never consider taking pharmaceuticals.

"Five minutes later your mouth is getting numb and your brain isn't functioning," she said. "I'm very creative. I cook all the time."

The 108-pound, 4 foot 11 1/2 grandmother said when she is stressed, medical marijuana also helps her eat.

"I need what it gives me - relief from the pain and it makes my attitude much better. It gives me a nice appetite," she said. "I'll be smoking on my death bed."

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