

[Back](#)

---

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## Bayfield waffles on marijuana

Woman says doctor abused law in Denver

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A Bayfield woman concerned about abuse of Colorado's medical marijuana laws claimed to have witnessed abuse firsthand at a public show in Denver.

"I went up to a booth and the guy did not hesitate - did not hesitate - to write me a prescription so I could walk down to the local dispensary in Denver and get a bag of marijuana," said the woman, who would identify herself only as "Susie," on Monday night in Bayfield during a forum about dispensaries.

The meeting, moderated by Town Manager Justin Clifton, drew about 30 residents to discuss the future of medical marijuana in the town. The town has received two applications from dispensaries that wish to operate in Bayfield.

The meeting was held as the result of a Feb. 17 decision by the Bayfield Town Board to impose a 90-day moratorium on dispensaries in the town.

The board agreed to hold a series of public meetings about the issue before trustees decide to approve or deny any applications for dispensaries.

Impassioned arguments both for and against dispensaries were heard, but the conversation remained civil.

Travis Pollock, owner of the Natures Own Wellness dispensary in Durango, responded to "Susie's" story of medical marijuana abuse by explaining the difference between the doctors who write marijuana prescriptions and the dispensaries that sell medical marijuana to patients.

"The abuse that you witnessed is really unfortunate," Pollock said.

"If a doctor gives somebody the approval or the recommendation to be able to obtain their medical marijuana card, that's up to the discretion of the doctor ... that has nothing to do with us as dispensary owners or caregivers providing medicine to these patients."

Colorado voters approved Amendment 20 in 2000, allowing use of medical marijuana in the state.

Bayfield resident Joe Mozgai wondered why dispensaries are just now beginning to appear because the law was passed nearly 10 years ago.

Clifton said the reason is likely linked to the Obama administration's decision not to prosecute dispensaries in states that have laws allowing medical marijuana.

"I think the proliferation of dispensaries and that topic go hand in hand," Clifton said.

The most recent Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment statistics show 166 residents in La Plata County have prescriptions for medical marijuana as of Sept. 30.

Because there are five dispensaries operating in Durango, concerns were raised at the Bayfield meeting regarding how many dispensaries are needed to meet the demand.

Pollock claimed the state health department statistics are not up to date, and there are actually many more patients in the county.

"My dispensary currently serves as the primary caregiver for about 200 patients," Pollock said.

Since opening last September, more than 700 patients with valid prescriptions have visited his business, he said.

David Wells, who has applied to open a dispensary in Bayfield, agreed with Pollock's assessment.

"There's enough people here that can support us opening ... why force everybody to drive out of town?" Wells said.

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