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## Marijuana affects medical regs

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With the legalization of medical marijuana, Colorado and the other states with similar programs have entered uncharted territory, assuming the responsibility of regulating medicine outside the medical community.

In the United States, medications that claim to treat or cure a disease or malady are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. All such medications are required to undergo a clinical trial process and intensive screening before being introduced to the public, according to the FDA's website. Marijuana, however, is still federally classified as an illegal, Schedule I drug and therefore is not regulated through the traditional pharmaceutical process.

As a result, state governments have the task of ensuring the safety of marijuana being sold as medicine, and the testing process is being perfected throughout Colorado.

Marijuana chemical analysis is done through use of a gas chromatograph that separates and analyzes compounds through vaporization without decomposition.

"A gas chromatograph is a unit that uses a liquid injection to turn the sample into a gas sample," said Travis Pollock, owner of Nature's Own Wellness, which has medical marijuana dispensaries in Cortez and Durango. "The gas is burnt off, and the results read back through a computer with the exact percentages in the medicine."

When analyzing marijuana, the significant results are the percentages of tetrahydrocannabinol, cannabidiol and cannabinol. Identifying the amount of THC, CBD and CBN in any given sample will enable the caregiver and user to know the effect of the medicine.

"There are two genomes of marijuana that are popular for medicine: sativas and indicas," Pollock said. "Each one of those plants causes a different effect for your body, and it is important to see which chemicals and compound are in these flowers, medicine, I'm giving to the patient based on the percentages."

Sativa plants are heavy in THC and act as stimulants while indicas contain a greater percentage of CBD and are "downers," or depressants, according to Pollock.

The type of ailment dictates the type of marijuana given to individual patients, Pollack said.

"If you have a patient in a wheelchair and you give them sativa it will make them really anxious," he said. "They would want to get out of the chair, and you don't want to promote that. Sativa is more of a daytime type of medication so patients are not so bogged down, and the indica is more for sleeping ailments and body pains and things of that nature."

Currently, marijuana chemical analysis is not mandated by the state, though dispensaries are required to list all nutrients and products that were part of the cultivation of the plants. State regulations expected in July 2011 likely will

contain testing requirements.

"Before it is sold, centers will have to do chemical analysis to ensure there are no harmful contaminants," said Matt Cook, senior director of the Colorado Department of Revenue's enforcement division, which is tasked with regulating the medical marijuana industry in the state. "My compliance people will see samples and random analysis. Every chemical used in the growing process will have to be accounted for."

Nature's Own Wellness centers are the only one in the state with an on-site gas chromatograph, Pollock said. He said he is ahead of the game and tests his products in order to provide optimal care for his patients.

"We purchased our gas chromatograph to make sure we go above and beyond to supply our patients with the correct medicine they are looking for," he said.

Full Spectrum Laboratories in Denver also has a chromatograph, according to the laboratory's website. Full Spectrum offers independent botanical testing and analysis. Although there are 803 dispensaries in Colorado, Full Spectrum lists only 12 dispensaries that voluntarily test their products. Genovation Creations in Colorado Springs also offers chemical analysis for dispensaries. Genovation Creations declined to list the number of dispensaries it serves.

In terms of the possibility of federal regulation, FDA approval and guidance would be a double-edged sword, according to Pollock.

"If we can get the federal government on our side with any favorable decision that would be a good thing," he said. "But then the big buck commercial stores would want to be involved like CVS and Walgreens, and they would put a lot of mom and pop shops that are doing great jobs with patients and have technical knowledge out of business. We want any type of federal approval, but we want to protect the industry that we built here."

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