

'Coach' helps clients understand medical marijuana

By Kim Smith ksmith@gvnews.com Jul 18, 2017



Bill Meeks took 30 pills daily until he began using medical marijuana just over a year ago.

Kim Smith | Green Valley News

Part 2 of 2. Read the first part about seniors finding pain relief through medical marijuana [here](#).

When Bill Meeks retired in 2008, he'd put in more than 30 years as a police officer and he was a mental and a physical wreck.

"My doctor handed me a piece of paper and said, 'You're retired. Here's a prescription for opioids and you need to go somewhere warm and dry,'" Meeks said.

Meeks filled the prescription, moved back to Pima County where he grew up, and was soon traveling the country lecturing about leadership five days a week. He'd come home on the weekends wracked with pain, down his pills and sleep until he got on the next plane.

One weekend, not long after Arizona passed a bill making medical marijuana legal, his sons flew in from Washington state and told him he needed to get off the drugs. They suggested medical marijuana.

"I laughed at them because the police perspective is, 'This is nothing but a foot in the door for the stoners to get their weed legalized,'" Meeks said.

Eventually, Meeks agreed to investigate medical marijuana, firmly convinced he'd prove there were no benefits. Strict Mormons and staunch conservatives, Meeks said he and his wife, Dorothy, looked at marijuana through medical, theological, scientific, historic and legal lenses. "My conclusion was this: cannabis is a powerful, natural medicine that has been demonized in American history and culture," Meeks said.

When he asked his doctor about obtaining a medical marijuana card, "He threw up his arms and said, 'Man, I've been dying for you to ask me,'" Meeks said.

It turned out his doctor didn't think it was appropriate for him to suggest it, but he was a big medical marijuana proponent, Meeks said.

The strong stuff

Meeks got his medical marijuana card and went into the first medical marijuana dispensary he found. He asked for "the strongest stuff you've got," put into a vaporizer and inhaled it. A short time later, he turned to his wife and told her, "I've forgotten where I learned to speak English."

The two laughed for hours; later, it came to Meeks: "Honey! I forgot about my pain!"

Over the course of the next year, Meeks said he probably spent \$3,000 experimenting on various marijuana strains trying to find just the right combination to relieve his pain, anxiety and insomnia. He spent the next few years broadening his research and developing a wealth of knowledge on marijuana.

About 18 months ago, Meeks decided to give up the lecture circuit to open a new business with Dorothy, who had also obtained her medical marijuana card due to arthritis and chronic pain. They decided to put all of the knowledge they had gained on their journey to good use. They became “medical cannabis coaches” devoted to helping other card holders navigate the world of medical marijuana.

For a fee, the couple help clients obtain cards, accompany them to dispensaries, explain the science of marijuana and the benefits and downsides of the different ways to ingest marijuana. They’ll even go to clients’ homes to help them the first time they use it, teach them how to treat and grind it up for use in vaporizers and how to store it so it won’t lose its strength or dry out. Additionally, the Meeks will take clients’ marijuana, infuse it with coconut oil and create capsules for them.

Twenty-five clients live in Green Valley/Sahuarita and most of them are in their 70s.

Some of their clients are referred to them by doctors, others by dispensaries, who often just don’t have the time or the inclination to educate their clients, Meeks said.

They say they might be the only marijuana coaches in the United States, but the need is there. In their opinion, there are two types of dispensaries — those that cater to people who have a legitimate medical condition they are seeking relief for and those that cater to people more interested in obtaining a recreational high.

The dispensaries that cater to those merely seeking a psychedelic experience are often less likely to take the time to educate those seeking help, Meeks said.

Worse yet, Meeks has heard stories of dispensary workers replying “What’s CBD?” when asked how much CBD or cannabidiol is in a particular product. CBD is one of the primary chemical compounds within marijuana. It has analgesic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-anxiety properties without the psychoactive effects of THC.

These dispensaries also have a reputation for “upselling” clients, in other words, selling them products they don’t need or are more expensive than the alternatives.

Meeks calls such dispensaries “pot mills” and he won’t direct any of his clients to them.

He refrains from using marijuana with their clients because he drives to the appointments, but Dorothy will demonstrate how to use a vaporizer once or twice, Meeks said.

“No, we don’t sit around and listen to Led Zeppelin or the “Dark Side of the Moon” and light up a reefer,” Meeks said.

The number of visits depends upon the client’s needs. Eventually, most clients find the right

combination and learn how to manage the marijuana on their own.

“We want to work our way out of our business relationship,” Meeks said.

The idea is to improve people’s quality of life, Meeks said.

He and Dorothy recalled a 48-year-old bile duct cancer client who remained functional, alert and comfortable his last five months while using medical marijuana. They also remember a 95-year-old client with bone and prostate cancer who actually gained weight and gardened for his last six months of life.

“We help people live and we help people die,” Meeks said.

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