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**What Your Government Knows About Cannabis And Cancer -- And Isn't Telling You**

Posted: 07/02/2008 5:12 am EDT Updated: 05/25/2011 12:35 pm EDT

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Senator Ted Kennedy is putting forward a brave face following his [recent surgery](http://ukpress.google.com/article/ALeqM5iAZlSkLv80-eZ1jKyJ38axYdOmdg) but the sad reality remains. Even with successful surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy treatment, [gliomas](http://www.emedicine.com/med/topic2692.htm) -- a highly aggressive form of brain cancer that strikes approximately 10,000 Americans annually -- tragically claim the lives of 75 percent of its victims within two years and virtually all within five years.  
  
But what if there was an alternative treatment for gliomas that could selectively target the cancer while leaving healthy cells intact? And what if federal bureaucrats were aware of this treatment, but deliberately withheld this information from the public?  
  
Sadly, the questions posed above are not entirely hypothetical. Let me explain.  
  
In 2007, I reviewed over 150 published preclinical and clinical studies assessing the therapeutic potential of marijuana and several of its active compounds, known as cannabinoids. I summarized these numerous studies in a book, now in its third edition, entitled [*Emerging Clinical Applications for Cannabis and Cannabinoids: A Review of the Scientific Literature*](http://www.norml.org//index.cfm?Group_ID=7002). (NORML Foundation, 2008) One chapter in this book, which summarized the findings of more than 30 separate trials and literature reviews, was dedicated to the use of cannabinoids as potential anti-cancer agents, particularly in the treatment of gliomas.  
  
Not familiar with this scientific research? Your government is.  
  
In fact, the first experiment documenting pot's potent anti-cancer effects took place [in 1974](http://www.alternet.org/story/9257/) at the Medical College of Virginia at the behest federal bureaucrats. The results of that study, reported in an Aug. 18, 1974, *Washington Post* newspaper feature, were that marijuana's primary psychoactive component, THC, "slowed the growth of lung cancers, breast cancers and a virus-induced leukemia in laboratory mice, and prolonged their lives by as much as 36 percent."  
  
Despite these favorable preliminary findings (eventually [published](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1159836) the following year in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*), U.S. government officials refused to authorize any follow-up research until conducting a similar -- though secret -- preclinical trial in the mid-1990s. That study, conducted by the U.S. National Toxicology Program to the tune of $2 million, concluded that mice and rats administered high doses of THC over long periods had greater protection against malignant tumors than untreated controls.  
  
However, rather than publicize their findings, the U.S. government shelved the results, which only became public after a draft copy of its findings were [leaked](http://www.thebody.com/content/art31497.html#medmar) to the medical journal *AIDS Treatment News*, which in turn [forwarded the story to the national media](http://www.thebody.com/content/art31499.html).  
  
In the years since the completion of the National Toxicology trial, the U.S. government has yet to authorize a single additional study examining the drug's potential anti-cancer properties. (Federal permission is necessary in order to conduct clinical research on marijuana because of its illegal status as a schedule I controlled substance.)   
  
Fortunately, in the past 10 years scientists overseas have generously picked up where U.S. researchers so abruptly left off, reporting that cannabinoids can halt the spread of numerous cancer cells -- including [prostate cancer](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6T36-3XFTGPR-X&_coverDate=09%2F24%2F1999&_alid=422767905&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_qd=1&_cdi=4938&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=1c29920efb1acb800723560310e9004e), [breast cancer](http://mct.aacrjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/6/11/2921), [lung cancer](http://www.nature.com/onc/journal/v27/n3/abs/1210641a.html),[pancreatic cancer](http://cancerres.aacrjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/66/13/6748), and [brain cancer](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16804518). (An excellent [paper](http://cancerres.aacrjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/68/2/339) summarizing much of this research, "Cannabinoids for Cancer Treatment: Progress and Promise," appears in the January 2008 edition of the journal *Cancer Research*.) A [2006 patient trial](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16804518) published in the *British Journal of Cancer*even reported that the intracranial administration of THC was associated with reduced tumor cell proliferation in humans with advanced glioblastoma.  
  
Writing earlier this year in the scientific journal *Expert Review of Neurotherapeutics*, Italian researchers [reiterated](http://www.expert-reviews.com/doi/abs/10.1586/14737175.8.1.37), "(C)annabinoids have displayed a great potency in reducing glioma tumor growth. (They) appear to be selective antitumoral agents as they kill glioma cells without affecting the viability of nontransformed counterparts." Not one mainstream media outlet reported their findings. Perhaps now they'll pay better attention.  
  
What possible advancements in the treatment of cancer may have been achieved over the past 34 years had U.S. government officials chosen to advance -- rather than suppress -- clinical research into the anti-cancer effects of cannabis? It's a shame we have to speculate; it's even more tragic that the families of Senator Kennedy and thousands of others must suffer while we do.

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