

Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community  
and Social Services – Enquiry into the Exposure  
Draft of the *Drugs of Dependence (Cannabis Use  
for Medical Purposes) Amendment Bill 2014 and  
related discussion paper)*

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## BACKGROUND:

I am a 20 year old female and in July 2012 I was diagnosed with Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS), after suffering symptoms since the age of 11. Ankylosing Spondylitis is an autoimmune disease that manifests as a form of inflammatory arthritis, usually of the spine. I don't have any memory of my life without pain. Prior to my use of cannabis I was taking up to 35 tablets a day and in hospital, on average, every 40 days over the last 2 years. After being told by multiple medical professionals that I was already receiving the best treatment available, and having no relief provided, my family started to investigate the research behind medicinal cannabis. I have now been medicating myself for two months and the results have been lifesaving!

As a result of my chronic illness I have not only suffered physically, but also psychologically as a result of my AS. While not directly addressing the questions in the discussion paper, my submission will hopefully serve to illustrate to the committee, the life-saving nature of my use of Cannabis oil.

## PHYSICAL

My arthritis has placed extreme limitations on my life. In 2012 my symptoms flared due to the stress I was under in the HSC and I was sent to the emergency room where I was admitted and diagnosed with AS. Prior to starting on the cannabis on a good day I couldn't stand for more than 30 seconds without pain, I was dependent on crutches, had to use a chair to shower myself and aids over my toilet to help me. I have spent the better part of 3 years bed bound and dependent on my parents for care. When at my worst my mother will need to shower me and help me on and off the toilet.

As mentioned, I was on a multitude of medication, all of which had severe side effects. In 6 months I lost more than 10 kg and would go through bouts of vomiting, sometimes for up to 2 weeks. I had to withdraw from university due to my reduced cognitive capacity, a side effect of opiates.

I have always had to be extremely careful in every aspect of my life to not exacerbate my pain. This involved quitting sport and my casual job at the age of 17. I hadn't worked for 2 years prior to my starting on medicinal cannabis and was dependent on the Disability Support Pension.

My chronic illness was completely debilitating and as a result I have been working with my physio for years to avoid the muscle wastage that results from being bed bound.

After two months of treatment with Cannabis oil I have enrolled in university and am now working 2 jobs, cooking for myself, doing my own laundry and exercising again. All things I was never able to physically manage.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

As a result of my chronic illness I have gone through bouts of depression over the last 10 years. In the recent months, prior to my use of cannabis, my depression was at its worst. I was suicidal and had completely withdrawn from my family and friends. I was entirely dependent on my parents for care, which was not only humiliating but also demoralizing.

Being admitted to hospital so frequently also had its toll on my mental health. I have been verbally assaulted by my specialist that led to a change of specialist, had 2 women pronounced dead next to me and in one instance left to lie in my own urine for close to an hour. Such instances have really taken its toll on my mental health.

I have found that the cannabis has not only helped my physical symptoms but has also helped regulate my mood. I have regained my dignity and independence, which in itself have been invaluable to my recovery.

At the moment I am taking 2-4 drops of CBD oil in the morning. This not only dramatically reduces my pain but I have found that my stiffness will dissipate within 5 minutes. Prior to my cannabis use, my stiffness wouldn't start to subside until early afternoon, limiting my mobility dramatically.

In the beginning I was using a vaporizer to inhale the THC, but found after 2 weeks that this wasn't necessary unless I had a bad day pain wise.

Last week I was given a tincture of pure THC oil to use as my final backstop when my pain is so severe. It works almost instantly and I find the psychotropic effect almost non-existent, definitely not as severe as the opiates I was on!

## CONCLUSION

The best that doctors could do was try to alleviate my pain with toxic drugs that they know don't work with chronic pain. My gastrointestinal issues were worsened by the side effects of that medication.

I find it infuriating that such an effective medication is criminalised. My parents are risking a lot to help acquire effective treatment; I believe that is a testament, not only to our desperation for help, but the efficacy of Cannabis!

This medication has given me my life back and I am so angry that such an improvement in my life had to be sought through illegal means. My family and friends have noticed such a dramatic improvement in my health and I'm not able to share with them the treatment that is working, not only for security reasons but because of the stigma that is attached to the use of cannabis.

I wanted to write a submission in order to emphasise that the legalisation shouldn't only focussed on those with cancer and other terminal illnesses. It shouldn't only be used for palliative care but treatment of chronic illnesses.