



My name is Gregory Boucouvalas (RPh & MS Human Nutrition). I live in Saco and work as a staff pharmacist at South Berwick Pharmacy Seacoast & Compounding, as well as at Discovery House, an addiction medicine treatment facility in South Portland.

I have been working as a community pharmacist in Southern Maine since 1983. I am a new volunteer member of Seed2Health Learning Health Alliance where I am working to contribute lessons from my experiences responsibly integrating botanical/natural medicines into a patient's allopathic medical regimen.

Much of what I am sharing with Seed2Health, I learned as co-owner and co-operator of a health food store (Neighborhood Health & Herbs-Saco) for nearly 20 years and an integrative/hybrid pharmacy (Apothecary by Design-Portland), which combined compounding, specialty, retail, and wellness for nearly 10 years. As an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of New England's School of Pharmacy, for the past 3 years I have presented a "Medical Cannabis & The Endocannabinoidome" lecture to their Phytotherapy class.

As the Medical Marijuana and Adult Use markets continue to expand, during pharmacy consults it is fairly routine to discover that a patient is using cannabis in combination with prescription and/or over the counter/"OTC" medicines.

Since pharmacists are the most accessible personnel knowledgeable in medicines, engaging in an open dialogue regarding the use of cannabis is in the best interest of the patient. Appropriate advice is required to prevent avoidable harm.

Unfortunately, there is a strong hesitancy among pharmacists to engage in more impactful roles relating to medical marijuana (e.g. caregiving, compounding, consulting, formulating, etc.). This in part is due to the long-held position of the Maine Board of Pharmacy - namely that marijuana is a Schedule I drug and is therefore outside of the scope of practice of its members.

This policy is somewhat at odds with the Board's approach to heroin use, another Schedule 1 drug. As a harm reduction measure to protect the public from the spread of disease, insulin syringes are routinely sold at pharmacy counters without a doctor's order and are often known to be used to inject heroin. Perhaps, under the rubric of consumer safety, this may be the way forward for the Board's engagement with cannabis use.

In collaboration with Seed2Health and other pharmacists in Maine along with the collaboration we are seeking to build upon with the International Society of Cannabis Pharmacists/"ISCP" (see <https://cannabispharmacist.org/>), we are working toward helping the Board of Pharmacy determine the roles it can play regarding the safe and

responsible use of medical marijuana. This is very much needed in order to guide pharmacists on how to best engage in this space.

Currently, several states including Arkansas, Connecticut, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania require the employment of a pharmacist by licensed medical marijuana dispensaries, with according guidance provided by their respective Boards of Pharmacy. Some of these states support the inclusion of approved cannabis formulations into their Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) databases, thus allowing for a more comprehensive drug utilization review.

And with the broadening use by Maine's citizens of cannabis for social and other non-therapeutic purposes, the Board should also consider its roles as a steward of safe and responsible use of all drugs in a population that is increasingly using cannabis for non-therapeutic purposes, as well.

As the science of cannabis medicine continues to emerge, more and more healthcare providers will be recommending its use to their patients. In the future, pharmacy, medical and nursing schools will fill the current void in their curriculums by including courses on the "*Endocannabinoidome*" helping to legitimize this type therapy.

In the meantime, pharmacists guided on how to best protect the public could serve as a valuable medical cannabis community resource, ultimately resulting in better patient outcomes.

Respectfully,

Gregory Boucouvalas RPh