



ASAM

The Voice of Addiction Medicine
American Society of Addiction Medicine

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New York Times Calls for Legalization of Marijuana, ASAM Strongly Objects

CHEVY CHASE, MD, July 28, 2014 – The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) strongly objects to federally legalizing marijuana use, opposing *The New York Times*' lead editorial, "Repeal Prohibition, Again," that appeared Sunday, July 27. Stuart Gitlow, MD, president of ASAM and a board-certified Addiction Medicine specialist, called the paper's stance "irresponsible" and "ignorant of the facts" that clearly place marijuana on the continuum of psychoactive drugs that trigger addiction and lifelong chronic brain disease.

ASAM, the largest American medical professional society dedicated to the treatment and prevention of addiction, has examined the medical and recreational use of marijuana and the public health consequences of both. In neither case does the Society find sufficient evidence to support the notion that any perceived public health benefits of using the illicit drug outweigh the dangers to marijuana users and to their communities.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, marijuana is an intoxicating drug that impairs memory, motor function, and, when smoked, short-term and long-term respiratory health. And, for nearly one in ten habitual users, marijuana is addictive and can lead to chronic brain disease.

"Addiction is a chronic brain disease that can affect people at any age. In fact, the younger one initiates alcohol or drug use, the greater the likelihood that he or she has addictive disease," says Dr. Gitlow. "The addicted brain doesn't care if the substance is alcohol or marijuana; both can be very dangerous, particularly to the naïve user."

ASAM rejects the *Times*' position that marijuana has been treated in the same manner as alcohol, and that its long-held illegality is akin to Prohibition. As Dr. Gitlow says, the paper's alcohol/Prohibition analogy is poor on several levels: "At the start of Prohibition, alcohol consumption per capita was twice what it was at the end of Prohibition, proving Prohibition reduced the public's alcohol intake. Likewise, the rate of alcohol-associated illness dropped. Prohibition was eventually a political failure, but it was an impressive success from a public health stand point."

ASAM supports public policies that provide prevention and treatment for the chronic brain disease of substance addiction that affects 23 million Americans. Dr. Gitlow cautions that "this requires, however, that substances of abuse are not made more easily available or made to seem less dangerous than they really are."

ASAM encourages *The New York Times* to re-examine its official editorial stance and to start building public awareness for addiction as a chronic brain disease that has proven methods for prevention and treatment, whether the addictive substance is alcohol, nicotine, marijuana or prescription opioids.

ASAM looks forward to partnering with *The New York Times* and other leading media and public education outlets to advance science-based policies that deter unhealthy substance use of all types and promote access to medical and behavioral treatment for those who need it.

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The American Society of Addiction Medicine is a national medical specialty society of more than 3,000 physicians. Its mission is to increase access to and improve the quality of addiction treatment, to educate physicians, and other health care providers and the public, to support research and prevention, to promote the appropriate role of the physician in the care of patients with addictive disorders, and to establish Addiction Medicine as a specialty recognized by professional organizations, governments, physicians, purchasers and consumers of health care services and the general public. ASAM was founded in 1954, and has had a seat in the American Medical Association House of Delegates since 1988.