



ASAM

The Voice of Addiction Medicine
American Society of Addiction Medicine

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President Comments on Marijuana Use, ASAM Expresses Concern

CHEVY CHASE, MD, JANUARY 21, 2014 – The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) expresses its concern that the [President's comments regarding marijuana use](#), in the January 27, 2014 edition of The New Yorker magazine, may contribute to the growing misperception among America's youth that marijuana is harmless.

ASAM, the largest American medical professional society dedicated to the treatment and prevention of addiction, has examined both the [medical](#) and [recreational](#) use of marijuana and the public health consequences of both. In neither case, did the Society find sufficient evidence to support the notion that the public health benefits of using the illicit drug outweighed the dangers to 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, respiratory health. And, for nearly one in ten habitual users, marijuana is addictive.

"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. Stuart Gitlow, ASAM's President. "The addicted brain doesn't care if the substance is alcohol or marijuana; both can be very dangerous, particularly to the naïve user."

ASAM respects the President's concerns regarding inequitable drug-related criminal sentencing policies and has long held a [policy](#) that treatment is a more appropriate response to minor drug-related criminal offenses than incarceration. "Public policies that support prevention and treatment for addiction should be the basis of our government's response to a chronic disease that affects 23 million Americans," offers Dr. Gitlow. "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 President and our nation's policy makers to build public awareness for addiction prevention and treatment, whether the addictive substance is alcohol, nicotine, marijuana or prescription opioids. ASAM looks forward to working with the Administration and state and federal policymakers to advance science-based policies that deter unhealthy substance use and promote access to treatment for those that need it.

The [American Society of Addiction Medicine](#) is a national medical specialty society of over 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.