

P.B1

## Doctor Discusses The Dangers Of Pot Use

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Herald-Tribune Reporter

"Marijuana is a far more dangerous drug than any of the experts had guessed," concludes Dr. Robert L. DuPont, president of the Institute for Behavior and Health of Washington, D.C.

In a talk to Straight Inc. staff members after a visit to one of their open meetings last year, Dr. DuPont candidly explained why he changed his mind on marijuana — from liberal support of decriminalization to firm opposition. He said the facts changed his mind.

What is wrong with pot?

According to the accumulation of research made available only recently, there are first of all, "acute" effects (associated with the immediate intoxication).

Those include disruption of thinking, learning and remembering. Difficulty in finishing a thought or a sentence are used as an example. There is also disruption of all "motor" ability — driving a car, for example. Signals from the brain to function are impeded, which, combined with difficulty thinking, make for a less capable person than he or she normally would be, according to DuPont.

Then, there are "chronic" or lasting symptoms of marijuana smoking because of one major fact. Marijuana's active ingredient (delta-o or THC), is not a water soluble chemical.

Our bodies are equipped to excrete water soluble chemicals (those that break up in water) and the blood, too, passes such chemicals. But marijuana's basis is only fat-soluble, like DDT. So it continues to accumulate in the body, no matter how small the dose.

That's how it affects the brain — a fatty tissue where it can dissipate. The chemical is proved to affect cell division, and new evidence points to brain damage associated with marijuana use.

THE OTHER MAJOR FATTY tissue it gravitates to is the reproductive system. The THC chemical is known to reduce testosterone (the male sex hormone) and has a major effect on the female reproductive system, according to recent research. The chemical increases abnormal menstrual periods in women, and when administered several times a month to laboratory animals, smaller infants, less healthy offspring and fewer births were noted.

(Please Turn To Page 2-B)

## Marijuana

(Continued From Page 1-B)

Because THC cannot break down in water, 30 percent of a single dosage remains in the body after a week. Even after a month, measurable amounts from that single administration remain in the body. So when a person smokes enough to continually keep THC in the body, he has the "chronic" and not just "acute" effect.

Other chronic effects are noted in the respiratory functions.

Marijuana smoke has more tar and known carcinogens than tobacco smoke, and puff for puff, there is good evidence in human tissue culture work that marijuana smoke causes cancer-like transformations in previously healthy tissues. (Marijuana smoke produces more of these changes than

marijuana regularly.

From Bradenton to Naples, an estimated 10,000 teen-agers smoke marijuana every day. 2,500 youths were arrested last year in Sarasota, most related at least in part to drugs.

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previously healthy tissues. (Marijuana smoke produces more of these changes than does tobacco smoke.) And, of course, marijuana smoked regularly produces bronchitis and chronic cough, actually causing more respiratory irritation than tobacco smoke.

One of the unhappiest chronic effects of marijuana smoking, according to the doctor, is its measured effect on mood. As opposed to the acute elevation of mood during one intoxication (on marijuana), the longer, chronic effect is one of isolation and irritability.

**WHY HAS MARIJUANA USE** grown so enormously? (Statistics indicate one out of every nine high school seniors gets high on pot every day.)

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Dr. DuPont relates that increase to the passivity inherent in a youthful generation that grew up with constant television and lack of two parents in the home.

At any rate, the statistics (taken annually since 1975) show 11-12 percent of the nation's high school seniors smoke marijuana every single day, and the drop-outs from high school have an even higher rate. Only about half that many use alcohol every day. Marijuana use by seniors doubled from 1975-1978, while their alcohol use increased only slightly.

Among 18-21-year-olds, conservative estimates show more than 31 percent get high on