

20 March 2018

Committee Secretariat
Health Select Committee
Select Committee Services
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON 6160

Via online submission form

To the Health Select Committee

Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in New Zealand and Australia. RACS is a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7000 surgeons and 1300 surgical trainees and International Medical Graduates. As part of its commitment to standards and professionalism, RACS strives to take informed and principled positions on issues related to public health in New Zealand.

RACS recently considered the legalisation of medicinal cannabis in response to legislation proposed in South Australia in early 2017. At that time we felt there was insufficient evidence to support the medicinal use of cannabis, and we do not believe additional evidence has been forthcoming in the past year. While some scientific evidence exists to indicate the potential therapeutic value of cannabis-derived products, there is also considerable evidence highlighting the dangers of frequent cannabis use. Overall the scientific and clinical evidence to justify legalisation is poor, and consequently RACS has formed the position not to support the pathway for patient access to medicinal cannabis in New Zealand or Australia.

Imaging studies in adolescents have shown that regular cannabis users display impaired neural connectivity in specific brain regions involved in a broad range of executive functions. Frequent and persistent cannabis use starting in adolescence was associated with a loss of an average of 8 IQ points measured in mid-adulthood. Therefore RACS urges extreme caution in the use of cannabis in children, adolescents or any other vulnerable groups except in the context of well-run clinical environments or appropriate ethically approved medical research.

Additionally, RACS has been concerned by media commentary suggesting the possible economic benefits that could be derived from a medicinal cannabis industry in New Zealand. Any decision regarding a medicinal cannabis regime must be motivated exclusively by the possible improved health outcomes for patients and with the community's best interests at heart.

For these reasons RACS cannot support the Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Bill.

Yours sincerely



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Chair
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