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WSU cannabis research to partner with pharmaceutical firm

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By Karen Hunt, Office of Research

PULLMAN, Wash. – Washington State University researchers and Biopharmaceutical Research Company (BRC) will partner to evaluate cannabis and accelerate the pace of cannabis research. The innovative partnership allows WSU scientists, many of whom are part of the university's Collaborative for Cannabis Policy, Research and Outreach (CCPRO), greater access to cannabis for research purposes while remaining fully compliant with federal regulations governing cannabis.

WSU researchers will use BRC cannabis analytical services and subject matter expertise to help investigate the health effects of cannabis on physical and mental health, as well as the impact of cannabis use on public safety. The research will fulfill WSU's mandate to identify the impact of policies, such as the legalization of cannabis on the health and safety of Washington State citizens.

Many WSU researchers have received federal approval to possess cannabis for research purposes, but many barriers still exist. Until recently, researchers were only allowed to obtain cannabis from one federally-approved source and efforts to license additional producers stalled. In August of 2019, the US Department of Justice committed to advancing a 2016 program to license additional producers of cannabis for research. The demand for the currently available research cannabis is high, the supply is limited, and the cannabis available is unlike the cannabis that is available in retail stores in Washington and other states.

“We know less about the health benefits and risks of cannabis than almost any other drug. Currently, cannabis researchers must jump over extensive barriers to obtain cannabis they need to conduct human and animal research on the effects on health,” said Dr. Michael McDonell, chair of the CCPRO. “Our partnership with BRC allows us to begin to work together to problem-solve innovatively through federally compliant strategies to obtain cannabis for research purposes.”

Due to the high demand for research cannabis, BRC is leading the way in seeking federal approval to analyze, import, and ultimately grow cannabis for research purposes. BRC is registered with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to study cannabis products. The company also has filed for a cultivation permit, which, if granted, would allow BRC to produce its own cannabis

and cannabis-derived products for federally approved research. Though neither WSU nor BRC is cultivating cannabis as a part of this partnership, a collaboration with WSU demonstrates the growing need for access to high quality cannabis for research purposes.

“Partnering with a research institution of Washington State University’s caliber ensures that we are working with premier investigators to uncover the promise of these products and, also, that we are meeting our responsibilities, as far as public safety risks are concerned,” said George Hodgin, CEO of BRC. “We know these products have shown a great deal of promise in aiding patients suffering from a variety of health conditions, including PTSD and chronic pain, yet federally-compliant research in the United States is sorely lacking. It is time to provide health care providers, regulators and law enforcement officials with a fuller story, so they can effectively do their jobs to get the most out of cannabis while protecting citizens from any potential harm.”

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