

Weighing up use of cannabis

It's hard to find a low side to the cannabis high, writes **Gordon Rowland**.

THERE is inconsistency and injustice in our drug laws.

It's necessary to understand the facts about alcohol, cannabis, pharmaceutical medicines and tobacco.

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, addictive and potentially lethal to a significant minority of users. It is linked to brain damage, cancer, heart disease and foetal alcohol syndrome.

In the short term, alcohol numbs the higher centres of the brain, prompting some drinkers to acts of violence. Alcohol-fuelled domestic and public violence have become major issues in Australia, yet alcohol is still widely advertised, and legally available for consumption in unlimited quantities.

Tobacco is even more toxic and addictive, causing disease, disability and death on a massive scale. Tobacco accounts for 81 per cent of "recreational" drug-related deaths in Australia - four times as many as all other "recreational" drugs, legal and illegal, combined.

Tobacco cigarettes contain compounds that are carcinogenic and radioactive. The psychoactive ingredient, nicotine, is the most toxic plant product known.

Tobacco is linked to cancers of the oesophagus, stomach, colon, liver, pancreas, larynx, lung, bladder, kidney, cervix, lip and oral cavity. It is linked to acute myeloid leukaemia, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, atherosclerosis, aortic aneurysm, chronic lung disease, pneumonia, influenza and tuberculosis.

An overdose can occur if nicotine patches, nicotine gum and cigarettes are used together. As nicotine readily passes into the bloodstream following dermal contact, a high concentration of nicotine spilled on the skin may have fatal consequences.



It could be argued that cannabis has less side-effects than other legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco.

Women who smoke or use nicotine gum and patches during the early stages of pregnancy, have an increased risk of birth defects.

Yet tobacco is legally available for consumption in unlimited quantities.

Pharmaceutical medicines - prescription and over-the-counter - are the third-leading cause of death, after cancer and heart disease. In 2014, the Victorian Coroners Prevention Unit said pharmaceutical drugs played a role in 80 per cent of Victorian overdose deaths in 2012-13, twice as many as illegal drugs.

In stark contrast, cannabis has never caused a single confirmed fatality, and research indicates it is less likely to cause addiction than alcohol, tobacco and many pharmaceuticals, with minimal, if any, adverse long-term side effects. Cannabis is also analgesic, neuro-protective, anxiolytic, antidepressant, anti-psychotic, anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory.

The discovery of the endocannabinoid system has revealed the intimate association

between cannabis and human health, opening up new avenues of research for the prevention and treatment of conditions including Alzheimer's disease, cancers, diabetes, epilepsy, glaucoma, multiple sclerosis and stroke.

An important property of cannabis is apoptosis - the selective targeting of cancerous cells to self-destruct, while leaving normal cells unaffected. This represents a challenge to the lucrative chemotherapy/radiation model, with its adverse side effects.

The endocannabinoid system is a central regulatory system that affects a wide range of biological processes including homeostasis (stability of physiological processes), vital to healthy functioning. The system involves a group of compounds, known as cannabinoids, produced within the human body, with a significantly higher concentration in breast milk. A 2004 study, published in the *European Journal of Pharmacology*, describes how the endocannabinoids in maternal milk appear to activate the sucking

reflex of breast-feeding infants.

Since tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) was first isolated in 1964, more than 80 cannabinoids, including cannabidiol (CBD), have been identified. When ingested or vaporised, THC, CBD and other cannabinoids augment or replace the body's endocannabinoids, damaged or depleted through exposure to environmental pollutants, food additives and other stressors.

Cannabis is a truly restorative, "recreational" herb, a food akin to vitamins and essential minerals, in contrast to alcohol, pharmaceutical medicines and tobacco.

The real reason cannabis is prohibited is because it presents an organic, sustainable, non-toxic alternative to powerful vested interests, including alcohol, tobacco and, the pharmaceutical industry, that Professor Peter Gotzsche exposes in his 2013 book *Deadly Medicines and Organised Crime: How Big Pharma has Corrupted Healthcare*.

The federal government, via the Therapeutic Goods Administration, accepts the aggregated information submitted by pharmaceutical companies seeking approval, without analysing the raw data. The TGA then allows them to market their often inadequately assessed products in Australia.

Most of the big companies have been found guilty and fined for criminal offences, including illegal off-label marketing and intent to fraud or mislead. Yet the TGA still allows these companies to push their drugs in Australia.

Meanwhile, otherwise law-abiding citizens are treated as criminals for choosing cannabis, as safer and more effective for their conditions, in preference to these synthetic products. Likewise, many recreational users prefer cannabis as safer and more agreeable than alcohol or tobacco.

Gordon Rowland is a retired osteopath from Pacific Palms. This is an edited version of a letter he and 243 co-signatories sent to federal Health Minister Sussan Ley.

Court appointment of woman judge sound

Any notions of favouritism are unimportant, writes **Kcasey McLoughlin**.

THE announcement that Federal Court judge Michelle Gordon will replace Justice Kenneth Hayne on the High Court restores an almost equal gender balance on the bench.

When Judge Gordon takes her seat in June, the number of women sitting on the High Court will return to three out of seven judges. The new judge is married to the judge she is replacing, which is an interesting and unprecedented dimension to the appointment.

However, with the exception of gender and marital status, this is not a surprising appointment.

High Court appointments are said to be the gift of the government of

the day. In this respect the appointment process in Australia is political, even if it has only very rarely been controversially so.

Appointments for the most part, though, are justified on the basis of merit rather than the politics of diversity.

But does the appointment of Justice Gordon mean that the politics of gender informed the government's decision?

Moreover, do her familial connections have any bearing on her appointment?

Attorney-General George Brandis' decision to appoint Justice Gordon may have been as a consequence of criticisms that arose when the court's second female judge, Justice Susan Crennan, was replaced by Geoffrey Nettle late last year.

The announcement of Justice

Gordon's appointment, however, focused on her extensive credentials and Mr Brandis downplayed Justice Gordon's marital connections and her gender in justifying the appointment.

He said: "It would, of course, in this day and age be outrageous for a person who was otherwise well qualified for an appointment, as Justice Gordon certainly is, to be disqualified on account of who they were married to."

This is not a radical appointment. Justice Gordon's current position as a justice of Federal Court of Australia and her commercial-law background all underscore her suitability for appointment.

Her legal credentials and family connections point to her experience and status as a legal insider.

It is, however, important to note that Justice Gordon is only the fifth

woman of the 52 judges appointed in the High Court of Australia's history.

She is the third woman judge appointed to the High Court by a Liberal government.

In light of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's perceived "woman problem", appointing a woman judge seems politically astute, especially given the criticisms that arose when Justice Crennan was replaced with a man.

Justice Gordon's appointment is in fact a win-win for the government, both in bolstering its gender credentials and in doing so without any direct engagement with the importance of gender diversity in judicial appointments.

Kcasey McLoughlin is a lecturer in law at the University of Newcastle

fromtheherald.com.au

Knights coach Rick Stone has predicted changes for the Anzac Day game against the Cowboys after suffering through Newcastle's 28-22 loss to Parramatta at Hunter Stadium on Sunday.

Better carry through on those words Rick. We don't like words very much. Action is much better. **Warlocks**

Time to make changes for sure Rick Stone. No place for lazy players in this competition! **Neweyboy**

Where do you start on the performance? Fact is, there's so many who need to be dropped for a while, where would all the replacements come from? **Glenn**

When Mullen and Gidley are gone I'll start to care again. Until then, yawn. **bunyip**

He won't drop any top name players. **BS**

Drop Gidley! Oh my god, this isn't a family team, drop him now. Show the town this is a professional club and drop him. **GW**

The coach should look at himself. **jo**

fromfacebook

Data collected from wearable fitness devices show that Novocastrians wake up earlier and walk further than most other people in the world.

No jobs in Newcastle, so have to be up early to travel to Sydney every day for work. **Tim Verschelden**

It's the little stops along the way, Macca's, the bottle, fish and chip shop, pizzas and so on. Gotta walk from the car too you know, not everyone delivers. **Mick**

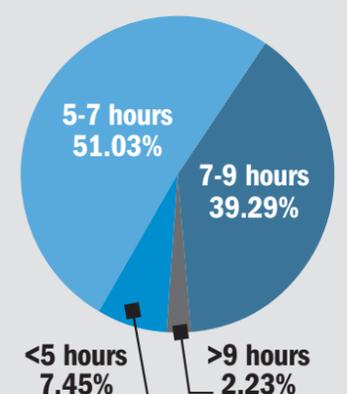
I definitely don't do the waking up earlier bit. Maybe the walking. **Alex Doyle**

I moved here a year ago and have noticed that people here are far healthier than the city I lived in previously. Also it's very noticeable how healthy and fit Newcastle kids are which is lovely to see. **Jojo Rona**

onlinepoll

Today's question
Do you check where your fruit and vegetables come from?

Saturday's result
How much sleep do you get each night?



THE HUNTER REMEMBERS Centenary of World War I Compiled by David Dial More at theherald.com.au

Headlines: April 21, 1915

News of the day. Toronto. German claim. British repulsed. German activity. In the air services. In the Carpathians. Enemy's great losses. In the Dardanelles. Turkish defences. Loss of E15. Turkish account. German absurdity. Navy to strike England. Japan's navy. Its increase.

Enlistments on this day

Private Vincent Campbell, Nelson Plains, 19th Infantry Battalion
Lieutenant Edward Gill, Merewether, 19th Infantry Battalion

From "German activity".

The *Daily Express* states that on the Belgian frontier there is great activity

among the entire German naval and military air services. Large quantities of incendiary bombs for Zeppelins have been concentrated at three bases. Additional hangars have been built in the Zeppelin depots, which have been disguised with much ingenuity to deceive the Allies' aircraft. The German purpose is to suddenly launch a great fleet from Germany and Belgium for a spectacular raid on England. This is to encourage the German people and the troops.