



UMB News

Face to Face: Teaching About Medical Cannabis

September 24, 2021 | By [Alex Likowski](#)

The Sept. 23 edition of *Virtual Face to Face with President Bruce Jarrell*, the regular online discussion program hosted by University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, examined the nation's first and only graduate degree program focused on medical cannabis science and policy.

Joining Jarrell were panelists **Leah Sera, PharmD, MA**, associate professor in the [University of Maryland School of Pharmacy \(UMSOP\)](#) and director of the degree program, and **Andrew Coop, PhD**, associate professor and associate dean for academic affairs in UMSOP.

The two-year, mostly online program is based at the Universities at Shady Grove in Rockville and is designed for any individual who has completed an undergraduate degree and is interested in pursuing a career in the medical cannabis industry. The first class of 132 students graduated in the spring of 2021. The third class met for the first time three weeks ago. The class includes 244 students ages 20 to 73 from all over the U.S., Canada, the UAE, and Costa Rica.

The plant *Cannabis Sativa* and its cousins have been used by humans throughout recorded history for many purposes. The seeds have been used for oil, the stalks for fibers used in cloth and rope, and of course the leaves and flowers for recreational and sometimes spiritual intoxication.

And for that reason, cannabis has also been a cause for concern and controversy for just as long. Although the plant has been used medicinally for thousands of years, the modern medical community only started to take another serious look at possible benefits that might be derived from the hundreds of chemicals found in the plant beginning the 1970s. By that time, marijuana was banned for use and possession in the U.S. by the Controlled Substances Act of 1970.

Today, 36 states and the District of Columbia allow some medical cannabis use, and the medical cannabis industry is growing at an incredible pace, projected to top between \$50 and \$60 billion by the end of the decade.

For example, Missouri opened its first dispensary less than a year ago, and now has 140 dispensaries across the state, with the industry there employing 5,000 people. Last week, Alabama hired its first Medical Cannabis Commission executive director, and has plans to begin cultivation next year. Here in Maryland, the state registered more than 123,000 certified medical cannabis patients by the end of last year. And dispensary sales totaled more than \$45 million just for the month of August this year.

The reason for such big business is a big need. Medical cannabis is used to treat chronic pain, to ease nausea experienced during chemotherapy, to improve the appetite of people suffering from HIV/AIDS, to calm the severe muscle spasms of MS patients, and much more. A lot of Americans fit into at least one of those categories. For instance, the National Institutes of Health estimates about 40 percent of adults experience chronic pain, and about 20 million of those people live with what's called "high-impact" chronic pain.

Of course, the medical part of medical cannabis is not the only complexity in the equation. The laws and regulations surrounding cannabis constitute a kind of Gordian knot. Although 36 states have legalized medical cannabis, and 18 states have legalized all forms of marijuana, the federal government still lists cannabis as a "Schedule I" drug, meaning that it has "no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse." That puts marijuana — even medical cannabis — in the same class as LSD and Ecstasy. It also means that its sale, possession, or use could result in arrest and incarceration.

That disconnect between the growing acceptance of medical cannabis and the legal complications posed by recreational cannabis may be due in part to a lack of understanding of the science of medical cannabis and its therapeutic use. That's why in 2019 UMSOP launched the nation's first graduate degree program in medical cannabis science. The [Master of Science in Medical Cannabis Science](#) and Therapeutics provides students with the knowledge and skills needed to support patients and the medical cannabis industry, add to existing research in the field, and develop well-informed medical cannabis policy.

Watch the entire *Face to Face* discussion, including questions from the audience, by following the link at the top of this page.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

The University of Maryland, Baltimore is the founding campus of the University System of Maryland.
620 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201 | 410-706-3100
© 2021 University of Maryland, Baltimore. All rights reserved.