

AMA Says Marijuana Dangerous., Calls For Less Harsh Penalties

The American Medical Association has joined in the fight against marijuana, labeling the drug "dangerous, and a serious public health concern." But at the same time the organization, which represents over 250,000 doctors, called for lighter punishment for users, saying present penalties are "harsh and unrealistic." The AMA will fight against the legalization of the drug but appears to be taking a moderate stand on laws governing it.

The Association said that even the milder types of the drug pose a serious social problem, similar to alcohol. The potential harm to the individual is even greater than with alcohol, the AMA said.

"We will be attacked by the hawks on one side, the doves on the other and even the sparrows will be disturbed," predicted Dr. Dana L. Farnsworth,

chairman of the Council on Mental Health.

WITH OCCASIONAL or "spree" use of marijuana, "the medical hazard is not so great," the AMA said, "although even such use when it produces intoxication can give rise to disorders of behavior with serious consequences to the individual and to society," the AMA said.

"And, while it is true that

now only a small proportion of marijuana users in the United States are chronic users and can be said to be strongly dependent on the drug, their numbers, both actual and potential, are large enough to be of a public health concern."

While the doctors stopped short of recommending an absolute abolition of punishment for drug use, they said, "legislators, law enforcement officials and the courts should

differentiate in the handling of the occasional user, the frequent user, the chronic user, the person sharing his drug with another and the dealer who sells for a profit."

"Of particular concern is the youthful experimenter who, by incurring a criminal record through a single thoughtless act, places his future career in jeopardy," the AMA said.

"The lives of many young people are being needlessly damaged."

Farnsworth, head of Harvard University Health Services, Cambridge, Mass., presided at a joint news conference called by the AMA's Council on Mental Health, Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the Committee on Problems of Drug Dependence of the National Research Council. The full statement will appear in the July issue of the AMA Journal, along with an editorial

titled, "Marijuana THING."

MARIJUANA is "certainly a dangerous drug because of its effect on the central nervous system and the fact that it can cause psychosis," said Dr. F. Leong Way, a pharmacologist. Way called for additional AMA-sponsored research and complained about difficulty in obtaining the drug legally for experimentation.

"Right now, it's more difficult to get marijuana for re-

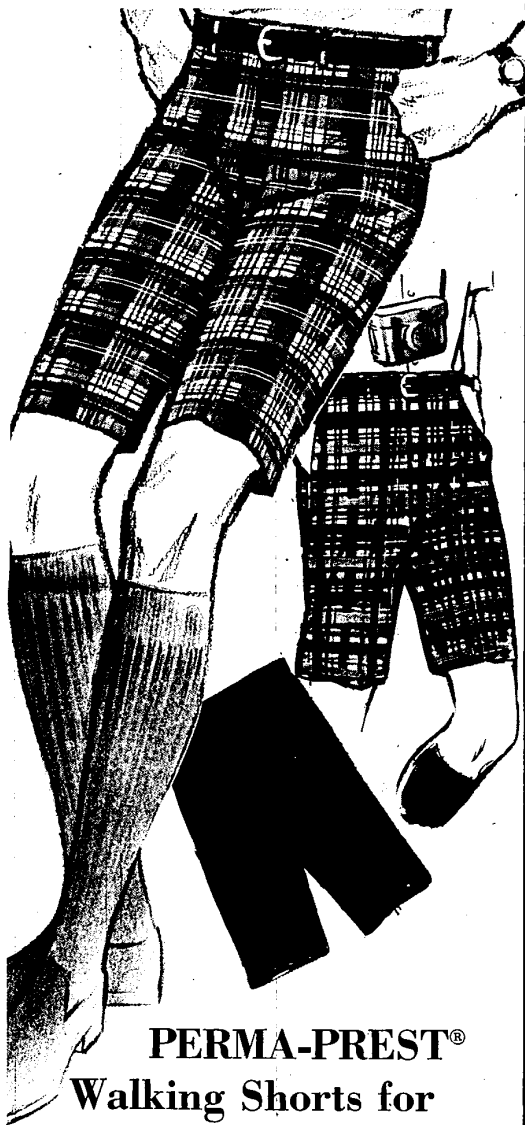
search than to get heroin," Way said.

Farnsworth estimated "probably 50 per cent of the college students on sophisticated college campuses" have experimented with pot. He said 90 per cent who try it will stop with no injurious effect. But the remaining 10 per cent, he added, suffer serious mental problems and develop withdrawal symptoms if they try to stop.

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