

Anti-pot academics paid by drug companies

By Lee Fang, Vice

As Americans continue to embrace pot – as medicine and for recreational use – opponents are turning to a set of academic researchers to claim that policymakers should avoid relaxing restrictions around marijuana. It's too dangerous, risky, and untested, they say.

Just as drug company-funded research has become incredibly controversial in recent years, forcing major medical schools and journals to institute strict disclosure requirements, could there be a conflict of interest issue in the pot debate?

Vice has found that many of the researchers who have advocated against legalizing pot have also been on the payroll of leading pharmaceutical firms with products that could be easily replaced by using marijuana. When these individuals have been quoted in the media, their drug-industry ties have not been revealed.

Take, for example, Dr. Herbert Kleber of Columbia University. Kleber has impeccable academic credentials, and has been quoted in the press and in academic publications warning against the use of marijuana, which he stresses may cause wide-ranging addiction and public health issues. But when he's writing anti-pot opinion pieces for CBS News, or being quoted by NPR and CNBC, what's left unsaid is that Kleber has served as a paid consultant to leading prescription drug companies, including Purdue Pharma (the maker of OxyContin), Reckitt Benckiser (the producer of a painkiller called Nurofen), and Alkermes (the producer of a powerful new opioid called Zohydro).

Kleber, who did not respond to a request for comment,

maintains important influence over the pot debate. For instance, his writing has been cited by the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police in its opposition to marijuana legalization, and has been published by the American Psychiatric Association in the organization's statement warning against marijuana for medicinal uses.

Read the whole story