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Colorado Conference Trains Doctors, Nurses in Medical Marijuana

Denver, CO – When Judy Armijo broke her wrist trail running, she arrived at her out-patient surgery appointment wearing a cannabis patch to control her pain. The hospital staff didn't know what to do. Even though marijuana – also known by its botanical name, cannabis – is legal in Colorado, virtually all the hospitals in the state have strict “no use or possession on site” rules. But those rules are for cannabis items found in a pocket or handbag, not stuck on the body of a 60 year old business professional woman.

Two nurses and four doctors swooped in, asking questions and peering at the patch. A huddled argument was held a few steps away. Then back with more questions. “They kept offering me narcotics instead” Armijo recalls, “But I don't do well on those.” Eventually, they went ahead with the local anesthetic procedure with the patch in place. “The shock was, not one member of the medical staff knew anything about marijuana.” says Armijo. “We may as well have been in an illegal state.”

Enter Martha Montemayor, a Certified Nutritional Consultant who encountered the doctor knowledge-gap while helping patients join the Colorado Medical Marijuana Registry. “Patients expect any doctor will be able to help them with both marijuana and prescription drugs. But cannabis isn't taught at medical schools, so it's hard for doctors to get scientific information.” says Montemayor “And strict hospital policies prevent primary care doctors from writing recommendations.” Nationwide, fewer than 5% of doctors have ever written a medical marijuana recommendation. Yet, polls show the percentage of US adults who've tried cannabis at near 50%. Do 95% of doctors really know nothing about a substance half their patients may have tried? Yes, it turns out. So, Montemayor began a non-profit professional society, Cannabis Clinicians Colorado, and the Marijuana for Medical Professionals conference to start training doctors.

Also called MJ for MDs, the 2018 conference offers up to 20 hours continuing medical education certified learning for doctors and nurses this October 14-16, 2018 at the Marriott Denver Tech Center Hotel. Budtenders, caregivers, and others working with cannabis patients are welcome, too. The program features a combination of traditional classroom learning, an Expo Hall of cannabis products, an on-site bookstore, and field trips to a dispensary and grow. The lectures teach how cannabis works in the body and the latest cannabis research from around the world. The guided field trips show health professionals what cannabis products look like. Montemayor says it's a safe way for doctors, nurses, and pharmacists to learn first-hand, without risking their professional license.

Speakers this year include top researchers from the US, France, Puerto Rico, and Israel. Topics include cannabis and the opiate crisis, cancer research, cannabis and the brain, autism spectrum disorder, and how cannabis medicine fits into an evidence-based medicine system. Presentations on in-progress research funded by the Colorado Medical Marijuana Research Grant lets attendees find out if their patients qualify as study subjects.

“The goal is fewer encounters like Judy's surgery appointment” says Montemayor, “and more healthcare decisions made from a position of science.”