

The Sir Philip Sherlock Distinguished Award for Outstanding Contribution to Medicine in Jamaica and the Caribbean Region

John Hall

Chair: *Archibald McDonald*

1974 at the US Senate and Beyond...Marijuana as I See It

The Hon John Hall

An interest in the neurological aspects of antisocial behaviour has been a long standing concern. Consequently, when several parents, including a university professor, complained of dramatic changes in their teenage sons' behaviour, there was heightened concern as the behavioural changes were directly linked to marijuana (ganja) smoking.

Ganja plants were first introduced to Jamaica in the 18th century by an English settler at his property in Gordon Town, near Kingston, as a source of fibre. Indian indentured labourers arriving from India in the 1850s brought ganja smoking as part of their culture.

In the late 1960s, a mountain village called Pinnacle, 20 miles west of Kingston, was raided by the police to disperse a community of Rastafarians. These black Jamaicans worship Haile Selassie of Ethiopia as god, smoke ganja routinely and also as a "sacrament" in their worship, and grow their hair into long locks. Pinnacle became notorious as a centre for praedial larceny and other criminal activities. After the Pinnacle raid, "Rastas" moved to other rural areas and slums of Kingston.

During the Cold War and the resultant political polarization in Jamaica, a precipitous decline in the value system became notable. Middle class boys and teenagers were inducted into ganja smoking.

The police facilitated the unfunded research at my Kingston Public Hospital Clinic by providing ganja, "chillum" pipe used by Rastas for ritual smoking and an appropriate number of volunteers. The recorded observations published in the British journal *The Practitioner* were requested by over 250 clinicians worldwide, led to a pres-

entation at the American Academy of Neurology meeting in New York in 1971 and to Testimony by invitation at the 93rd Congress of the United States in May 1974.

Findings were clinical and non-clinical. The former concerned blood sugar levels, blood pressure levels, heart rate, thyroid studies, and electroencephalography. Apparent decline in sexual potency after protracted use led Prof Robert Kolodny to further revealing studies on sperm count, testosterone levels and DNA in males who smoked ganja.

In 2015, the Jamaican Government "decriminalized" but did not legalize ganja smoking of 2 oz. In some quarters, there is concern as to possible conflict with international treaty obligations.

Previous Awardees

Professor Rolf Richards	(Jamaica/Trinidad)	2000
Professor David Picou	(Jamaica/Trinidad)	2001
Professor Sir George Alleyne, OCC	(Jamaica/Barbados)	2002
Professor Rene Charles	(Haiti)	2003
Dr Compton Seaforth	(Trinidad)	2004
Ron Raab	(Australia)	2005
Dr Knox Hagley	(Jamaica)	2006
Professor Lawson Douglas	(Jamaica and Barbados)	2007
and Professor George Nicholson		
Dr Winston Davidson	(Jamaica)	2008
Professor Jean-Claude Mbanya	(Cameroon)	2009
The Rev Ronald Thwaites	(Jamaica)	2010
Professor Edward Greene	(USA)	2011
Dr Henry Lowe	(Jamaica)	2012
Jos van den Heuvel	(The Netherlands)	2013
Warren Blake	(Jamaica)	2014
Professor Everard Barton	(Jamaica)	2015