

## CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

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The theme for this year's conference and workshop, **Cannabis and Cannabinoids: Research, Opportunities and Challenges**, presents us with the opportunity to be the premier platform for authoritative discussion and debate on the issues surrounding cannabis and cannabinoid research. Much is known about the psychoactive properties of cannabis, spanning thousands of years, dating back to its utilization by human societies since at least the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE. Like other plants with psychoactive properties, in antiquity, cannabis found utility primarily as medicine prescribed by shamans and physician-priests in those pre-modern settings.

History notes that there are several psychoactive compounds of the ancient world that have made their way into modern medical practice, including (but not limited to) *Papaver somniferum* (opium), *Atropa belladonna* (deadly nightshade) and *Erythroxylum coca* (coca). Cannabis has had a tortuous journey, initially largely ignored by Greco-Roman physicians and their Renaissance followers, followed by some mention in European pharmacopeias of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then disappearance. The societal reasonings that caused cannabis' 'demise' as a medicine are unclear, as are the forces that underpin its progressive resurfacing over the last 20 years. However, what is clear is that public opinion in many countries of the Western hemisphere, including Jamaica, has experienced a radical shift from viewing cannabis as a dangerous street drug to considering it as a relatively safe medicine.

Thanks to the many basic and clinical researchers over the past 50 years and more and their perseverance in spite of intermittent funding and irrational Federal and other local/regional regulators, we have more than a window into the actions of cannabis on the human body, its medical benefits and the risks it poses to users. We have had several licences approved by the Cannabis Licensing Authority in Jamaica, and more are in the works. Also, there is now a reasonably complete catalogue of the chemicals present in the plant, and many scientists have reported on the receptors through which one of its main components,  $\Delta^9$ -tetrahydrocannabinol, affects cell functions. Through this knowledge, ways are being developed to moderate this system to create new compounds with medicinal value for the treatment of various ailments. Further, data accumulated document the positive and negative impacts of cannabis on human health, which points to the need for further

research and unfettered critical discussion. This, we feel, is the only way to separate facts from opinions in this area.

As usual, this conference and workshop support the overall mission of The University of the West Indies (UWI) to advance education, create knowledge and support inclusive development of the Caribbean region and beyond. Research remains the life blood, fully embracing the economic and commercial models, while nurturing young researchers and contributing new knowledge to the world. As one of the leading biomedical research groups in the Caribbean, the Faculty of Medical Sciences of The UWI, Mona, is pleased to present the Faculty's 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Conference and Workshop. During this conference, we will continue to showcase the biomedical and clinical research being undertaken in the Faculty.

We invite you to attend our series of events which include the Ethics Seminar, the Sir Kenneth Standard Distinguished Lecture which will focus on Short- and Long-term Consequences of Cannabis Medicalization and Legalization, and our Research Conference and Workshop. This year, we will further celebrate the legacy of Sir Kenneth Standard as we recognize the work of Public Health Nurses who have excelled. We use this opportunity to congratulate Dr Jasneeth Mullings and Professor Rainford Wilks on the launch of their book, *Going Crazy in the City: Neighbourhood Context and Mental Health*, which chronicles the mental health effects of neighbourhood conditions in Jamaican communities.

We offer a special welcome to this year's Sir Kenneth Standard Distinguished Lecturer, Professor Marilyn Huestis, President of Huestis & Smith Toxicology, LLC, and Adjunct Professor at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, in Baltimore, Maryland, United States of America. Professor Huestis has had a distinguished career spanning the fields of investigations in toxicology, in utero drug exposure, and cannabinoids.

We trust our conference will excite and stimulate your intellectual interest. Thank you for joining us. Welcome.

Professor Paul D Brown  
Chairman  
Organizing Committee  
Faculty of Medical Sciences  
Annual Research Conference and Workshop 2017