

# PROFESSORS GET ROOMS OF THEIR OWN

## MEDICAL MARIJUANA

### Working with those who need pot to function

By Tom Blackwell

Crouched on a tattered rug, Doug Hutchinson casually pulls out a joint, lights it and sucks deeply on the pungent weed, while barely interrupting his animated monologue. It is one of about 10 pot cigarettes he will consume this day.

The tenured professor of philosophy is not only a legal user of medical marijuana, but he is "medicating" at the heart of the University of Toronto's picturesque Trinity College, in a room assigned to him expressly for smoking up.

Prof. Hutchinson appears to be the first employee in Canada to be given a venue for smoking medical marijuana on the job, and his accomplishment was duplicated yesterday by a criminologist at York University.

Marijuana activists say they hope other employers will join the club and accommodate workers who, they argue, can only become more productive if allowed to smoke pot on the job to better cope with pain, nausea or epilepsy.

"If I couldn't use marijuana here at work, I would have to kill myself. It makes all the differ-

ence," says Prof. Hutchinson. "You can lead a surprisingly effective life drowning in cannabis."

Trinity College's decision last month to offer him the room may evoke for some images of a campus turned pothead heaven. But the 51-year-old scholar of ancient philosophy says his smoking never makes him high, and does sharpen his ability to analyze complex texts in dead languages and teach intricate Platonic ideas.

The tall, gangly academic is one of about 1,000 Canadians who have been authorized by Health Canada to consume cannabis as a treatment for chronic pain, nausea caused by chemotherapy or disease, tremors triggered by multiple sclerosis, and other conditions. He will not divulge his own health problems for privacy reasons. Activists say there are several thousand others who use pot for medical purposes but have not received the government endorsement.

It seems many have either taken their drugs at home, or done so surreptitiously while at work.

Brian MacLean was one of those, forced to "skulk" around York University in suburban Toronto, despite his medical marijuana authorization from Health Canada. The criminology professor says he needs a hit at least every four hours to treat a severe form of degenerative arthritis. But late this past week, the York administration informed him it

would provide a ventilated office in his building, Vari Hall, for cannabis treatment.

A German manufacturer, meanwhile, is donating the university a "vaporizer," a device that heats marijuana until the THC — the active chemical — is vaporized and can be inhaled without taking in the tar and other toxic ingredients in pot smoke.

At a downtown Toronto marijuana café this week, Prof. MacLean demonstrates the machine, drawing on a plastic bag inflated with THC vapour.

"We've gone through everything and this is what allows me to get through the day," said Prof. MacLean, the author of 14 books in his field, and currently on a one-year contract at York.

Like Prof. Hutchinson, he says prolonged, heavy use of marijuana has meant the drug no longer makes him high. It does render more faint the constant "beating" of pain he feels throughout his limbs, made worse by a car accident three years ago that broke his back in three places.

But not everyone is happy about such on-the-job arrangements, with even a student newspaper in London, Ont., asking "should professors in an altered state of mind be allowed to teach at a university?"

Prof. Hutchinson — who has a doctorate from Oxford University, reads Latin and ancient Greek and co-edited a complete works of Plato — simply challenges critics of the policy to check out his work. That in-

cludes a critique in the works of a Plutarch essay against the Epicureans.

"They [naysayers] should come to my classes, they should read my articles, they should read my complete works of Plato," he said. "I couldn't have finished that project without marijuana."

The process of getting the room was by all accounts a rocky one, pitting Prof. Hutchinson against Margaret MacMillan, the provost, or head, of Trinity College and a famed historian who wrote the bestseller *Paris 1919*.

She said yesterday any delay in granting her colleague's request was simply a result of the novelty of the situation. There had been complaints from people "who didn't like smoke of any kind," and concerns about endorsing drug use in the midst of young students, Prof. MacMillan said.

But once the college was satisfied it was a medical requirement, she said, it moved ahead with setting up the room, a drab basement space with a single window and ventilation fan.

"I suspect it is not going to go away," the provost said of demands for workplace pot use. "If it alleviates symptoms, clearly it's a good thing."

At York, administrators also felt they had no choice, treating Prof. MacLean's marijuana use like any other medical need of an

employee, said Alex Bilyk, a university spokesman.

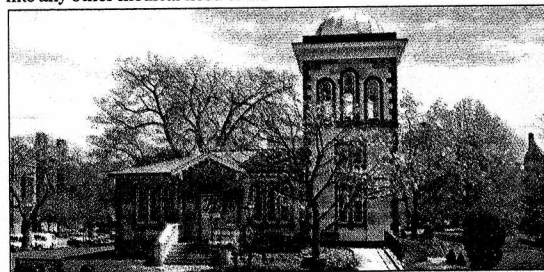
"Now that we've gone through this, we can certainly make similar arrangements should they be requested by someone else," he said.

While some debate continues about the efficacy of marijuana as a therapy, the science behind it is beginning to accumulate, said Linda Parker, a psychologist at the University of Guelph. Animal studies have shown it to be effective in treating pain and nausea. The brain's cannabinoid receptors, only discovered in the early 1990s, are proving to be a key and prevalent system that serves a protective function during strokes and epileptic seizures, she said. THC mimics the effects of the receptors.

Tracy Curley of the Toronto Compassion Centre, one of a network of clubs across Canada that supplies marijuana for medical uses, urged other employers to follow the universities' lead, even if it is just to let medical marijuana users smoke pot on the premises.

"Do I think that people should be allowed to smoke away in their offices? No, not an all-day thing.... But if you need to medicate, there are ways you can do it."

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The University of Toronto set up a smoking room for professor Doug Hutchinson and his marijuana use.

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