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# Cannabis News Florida Spotlight – May 2022 – Deborah McCauley, BSN – NurseDebb, LLC

**What benefits do you see for patients throughout Florida within this space?**

We have a legal medical cannabis program here in Florida and that should be a benefit, but it is sadly cost prohibitive for most. Those who could benefit from cannabinoid therapeutics, plainly, can't afford it. From the rampant stigma to the out-of-pocket costs, I would be hard pressed to call it a medical

cannabis program. We have to see a physician (who may or may not know enough about the Endocannabinoid System or cannabis as medicine) and when we go to get our actual medication, we have to buy it with cash from non-medical professionals. Our dispensaries are retail stores run by some really awesome people, but they have no background or foundation in medical education that enables them to safely guide patients in this area. I joke and call our program a legal cartel, but how far off am I in reality?

### **What motivates you to be a part of the cannabis Industry?**

I recognized a long time ago that our healthcare system was broken, and I have been trying to see how I could help make the most impact. Earth and entheogenic medicines are tools much like traditional western medicines, just misunderstood and misrepresented. It is time we move on from the prohibitionist thinking and fear-based healthcare. Profit over patient has been a long-used slogan to describe our modern system in the U.S. My motivation comes from breaking free from those lies and finding ways to return the autonomy of care to the patient. I focus on all patients but have a special place in my work for Veterans and do collaborate with vet organizations in advancing access, reducing costs, and removing barriers that prevent our military members from using these options in treatment.

After having to retire from the bedside after injury and burnout, I found my passion in legislative advocacy. I have been working toward a law degree, Juris Master, with a focus in Healthcare Regulation and am set to graduate later this year. As a Change Agent, it is my intention to help guide the regulatory framework to better serve our communities and improve the overall health outcomes of our country.

### **What field are you in within the cannabis space?**

I am a disabled Veteran and Nurse with a focus in Legislative

Advocacy and Healthcare Regulation. It is my hope to help change the legal landscape surrounding cannabis and other earth medicines through advocacy, regulation, policy, and education. Part of the nursing job is to educate the public on how to improve or maintain their health. While I do not provide direct patient education anymore, I do still educate. I have been advocating change from a top-down approach and do my best to educate our legislators and those in positions of power about the science supporting the use of earth and entheogenic medicines. Within the regulatory and legislative space, we have the opportunity to change the laws that govern the health of our country for the better.

**How can people in Florida benefit from the company you represent?**

I created NurseDebb, LLC (a veteran and woman owned business) to focus on legislation, advocacy, ethics, and policy development. I am a seasoned registered nurse and public health advocate who actively lobbies for change on federal and state levels surrounding earth and entheogenic medicines.

I am a passionate and driven advocate for earth and entheogenic medicines. The choice of treatment should be made between the provider and patient. I stay informed on relevant legislation, regulation, and evidenced-based research surrounding these alternative modalities.

**How did you get started within the cannabis industry?**

I was reintroduced to cannabis in my mid 30's. Having been a D.A.R.E kid, I steered clear of all taboo and illegal substances. To have the literal veil lifted after 30 years of propaganda made me furious! I could not believe the LIES we were sold and how we had been manipulated into adapting these false values.

I was doing my undergrad at this time and had access to all the professional research databases, which I took full

advantage of. I was also fortunate enough to live in the Northern Virginia area for over 20 years, with Washington D.C. sitting in my “backyard.” I attended my first lobbying event with VaNorml in January of 2019 to support the “Let Doctors Decide” legislation. This allowed the provider and patient to decide if cannabinoid therapeutics was right for them. We were successful in passing that bill, but the takeaway for me was how my visit changed the perspective of my local representative. He ended up voting yes to this legislation as a Republican. That was powerful to me and really called to me to continue to do advocacy work. In a way, you can say the bug bit me in Richmond.

Since then, I have met and connected with some amazing individuals. With more than 25 years of healthcare experience, I found that my expertise was sought after in the advocacy and legislative space. I found my niche. As part of the most trusted profession for 20 years running, nurses are poised to be at the forefront of this movement. We have the connection to our communities and have the ability to bridge the gap between professional and patient. It is an exciting time to be a nurse during this revolution in healthcare.

### **Are you personally a MJ card holder?**

I am a medical marijuana card holder here in the state of Florida. I am exercising my right to choose what medicine works best for me. I was diagnosed with left temporal lobe epilepsy while on active duty, a diagnosis that subsequently ended my military career. For years I was on pharmaceuticals, and I was fortunate that they did their job and kept my epilepsy at bay. It wasn't until I was seeking entrance into a Nurse Practitioner program that my eyes were really opened. Where pharmaceuticals did their job and kept me seizure free, I was unaware of the cognitive complications that arose from their use. I have taken pretty much all the different types of epileptic medications, the last being Phenobarbital. With the permission of my neurologist, I tapered off my pills and onto

cannabis.

Things were going great, I was doing well in school, was a more attentive partner and mother, and I was losing weight! It wasn't until I decided to taper back onto my meds in order to pass the drug test for that NP graduate school program, I was interested in that things changed. I had restarted my meds without telling my husband, who at one point came to me and asked me what I changed, and said I was acting "stupid." It just so happens that I was experiencing some serious cognitive delays and was finding it difficult to put things into eloquent words. I had no idea that the medication I had been taking for years was causing such a brain fog, among other issues. I tapered back off the Phenobarbital for the last time in 2018 and haven't looked back since.

I am transparent in my choice of medication and do my best to advocate for other patients who desires to utilize cannabinoid therapeutics. Moving forward, I would love to see home grow as an option for the patients of Florida.

**Do you see Florida moving forward with recreational marijuana/cannabis and how will that affect your business?**

I do see Florida eventually moving toward adult use. I do think this will take some time as change is needed in our legislature to secure those changes. Due to the nature of my business, I am excited to be part of this reality. I am looking forward to the day when we no longer criminalize, stigmatize, or continue to lie to the citizens of Florida about the benefits of using earth and entheogenic medicines. Much like the military, they are not for everyone, and that decision should be made between the provider and patient. Together they can decide whether or not these modalities are a fit in their healthcare plan.

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