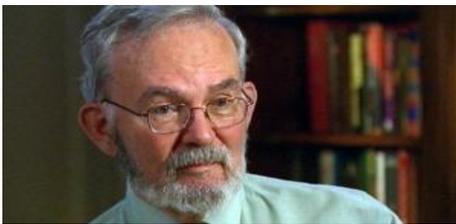


Creating a Monster

Due to the number of different chemical compounds it contains and their varying concentration from sample to sample, medical Marijuana has never been officially recognised by the FDA (America's Food and Drug Administration).

Their policy dictates that all medicines must have a single, reproducible formation—which is impossible to implement in a plant.

However, many people attest to the medicinal value of the plant, which has uses including reducing nausea and vomiting in chemotherapy, and pain relief.



American research professor John W. Huffman conducted a series of experiments, in an attempt to replicate some of the molecules found in Marijuana.

One of these synthesized molecules was called JWH-018, and it is widely used today—although for a very different purpose than Huffman had in mind.

JWH-018 was a chemical copy of THC, one of the active ingredients in Marijuana that gives users a 'high' or sense of

euphoria. The key difference was that this synthetic equivalent was more potent.

And so it was that John W. Huffman created one of the first active ingredients to be found in synthetic Cannabis, although such a use had never been his intention.

"We had no idea that anyone would be stupid enough to use it [...] If you want to get high, marijuana is easily available."
Professor J. W. Huffman

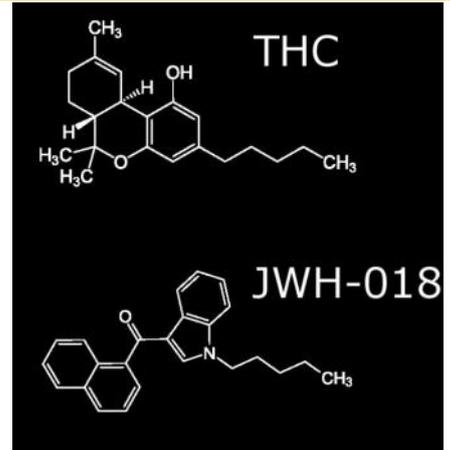
What had started out as an experiment to help improve the human condition through medicine, eventually ended up being used by legal high manufacturers to earn a profit.

Smoking blends of different herbs and botanical extracts had long been available from legal high stores, but these were mostly innocuous and of little effect. That is, until companies began to spray this organic matter with a solution containing synthetic cannabinoids.

The chemical solutions used on legal high products found in these stores and online, were not subject to the same quality testing and control that could be found in the laboratory.

The amount of active ingredient found from pack to pack could differ dramatically, and it was also difficult to know exactly what formulation was being used as these changed often.

Many different synthetic THC



molecules have been created over the years, in an effort to stay one step ahead of governmental efforts to ban or restrict the use and sale of legal highs.

New Zealand now finds itself in the calm eye of the hurricane, having criminalised the sale and possession of the last generation of legal highs. This peace will only last for so long, until the next wave of products hits our shores.

In future, such products will be required to undergo rigorous testing to prove that they are safe for use before they can be sold.

The place for the development and testing of these products—is indeed one should exist—is in a laboratory setting, subject to the same ethical and regulatory controls under which their chemical precursor was created.

The manufacturers and retailers of legal highs have profited considerably, but the social cost they have incurred has been so much greater. The mark they have left on our nation's physical and mental health will take some time to heal.

Tony Spencer

This month's "Korero Mai" and "What's On" are edited by Stephanie Mapley and "Whakaaro Pai" by Tony Spencer— from Like Minds Taranaki. Your news and views are eagerly sought. Like Minds Taranaki, PO Box 5015, New Plymouth, 3rd Floor, Brougham House, 50 Devon Street West, NP, ph. 06-759-0966 mental.health@xtra.co.nz. www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

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