March madness

No matter where you turned in March, you found someone eager to discuss medical marijuana.

During the first week of March alone, I felt I spent more time talking to the media than practicing medicine. The Minneapolis Star Tribune, St. Paul Pioneer Press, nearly all of the local television stations, Minnesota Public Radio and the Associated Press all wanted to talk about medical marijuana and what the physicians of Minnesota thought about it. And interest came from beyond the state’s borders. Our views on legalizing marijuana garnered attention in newspapers from Alaska to South Carolina and all points in-between.

Lawmakers wanted to talk about it, too, sometimes in lieu of other health care matters. Our legislative team often would begin meetings discussing one of the MMA’s priorities only to get sidetracked with a question on what we thought of therapeutic cannabis.

If only there was this much interest in the MMA’s priority issues. Medical marijuana, as sexy a topic it may be, is not one of our top priorities at the Legislature this year. We are also taking on other issues such as promoting team-based care and resisting independent practice by advanced practice registered nurses, prohibiting the use of tanning devices by minors, regulating e-cigarettes and battling prescription opioid misuse. These issues will directly affect our practices, yet they aren’t receiving a pittance of the coverage focused on medical marijuana.

Up until our board voted on a policy in mid-March (see page 28), we didn’t have an official opinion on medical marijuana. The MMA first discussed the subject in the late 1990s. We decided at that time not to take a position. We maintained that nonposition until this year. With pending legislation, we felt we needed to revisit it—thus the impetus for the March 4 policy forum. Although it turned out to be a spirited debate, with both sides making valid arguments, we decided to take an extra step to gather more opinions.

So, three days after the forum we sent out a survey to all of our active members. The responses flooded in, more than 200 in the first 15 minutes. The survey elicited an 11 percent response rate (nearly 900 respondents). A normal, acceptable response rate is around 2 percent, so receiving more than five times that really drives home the fact that the media and politicians were not the only ones intrigued by the issue. Doctors were, too.

The MMA strives to focus on the issues that most directly affect its members and their practices. That’s why our legislative and policy team deliberates over this extensively—to make sure we are working most efficiently on behalf of the profession. We want to make an impact. And we do. It just becomes more challenging to work on the issues that affect your practices when contentious issues such as medical marijuana threaten to pull us off course.

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