



## President's Message: Interactions with the Cannabis Industry

With the legalization of cannabis in Canada, we are faced with new policy and ethical questions regarding the position of CTS with respect to the cannabis industry as a potential sponsor and funder of research. The need for the development of evidence-based policies, practices, and programs relating to the use of cannabis and its derivatives spurred the federal government in 2018 to channel \$1.4 million in research funding through CIHR. Legalization also opened the door for

collaborations between industry, academia and the charitable sector. In January 2019, the Ontario Lung Association announced [a partnership with a cannabis company](#) to fund a research program that will investigate various health impacts of cannabis use. The Toronto Star and the CMAJ News have recently published op-ed articles exploring the ethics of accepting research funds from cannabis companies that promote the use of inhaled substances. On one hand, much needed and expanded research funding opportunities; on the other, ethical dilemmas requiring thoughtful reflection given obvious conflicts of interest with companies that promote the inhalation of burning substances.

In response to questions from members, and the prospect of requests for letters of support, the CTS Executive is confronted with insufficient guidance on how to manage this potential conflict. Without policies in place, we worry that the integrity of research may be undermined (perceived or real) and researchers may find themselves facing barriers related to publishing. These concerns are compounded by the fact that the issues related to cannabis are complex. For example:

- Cannabis (unlike tobacco), may have therapeutic value - it is the mode of delivery that is of concern for lung health;
- Cannabis (like opiates) may have potential for abuse; and
- Variations in legalization exist across jurisdictions.

The umbrella policies on tobacco supported by ATS, ERS and CHEST all restrict members who accept funding from tobacco companies from publishing in their journal, speaking at conferences and participating in leadership positions in the society. Will cannabis policies follow in a similar vein? Do such interactions with the cannabis industry warrant restrictions, or even prohibition, comparable to policies on interactions with the tobacco industry? Increasing investment in addition to real and potential control by tobacco companies requires extreme caution and due diligence.

Seeking to consult and align with our international society partners, we have reached out to ATS, ERS and CHEST to find they are also in the early stages of policy development. An immediate step ATS and CHEST have taken in response to this new situation is to revise their COI disclosure forms to now formally require disclosure of interactions with the cannabis

industry, in addition to the pre-existing requirements re: tobacco and other nicotine delivery. The National Federation of Specialty Societies, of which CTS is a member, is also exploring common ground.

We are working on a draft policy and will be open to further input and discussion. In the meantime, at this stage CTS members should proceed with caution in accepting funds from the cannabis industry to avoid being limited by opportunity in the future. We will keep you informed of any developments with our international partners that will inform this important debate.

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President, Canadian Thoracic Society

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