

8 December 2021

Mr Stephen Knight

The Committee  
WA Parliament  
Parliamentary Inquiry  
Cannabis & Hemp Inquiry

Dear Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

This is the first time I've made a submission to a state govt Inquiry, My submission will concentrate on the need for change on the ability for medicinal cannabis patients like me to be able to drive on medicinal cannabis in a legal way, which doesn't currently exist in WA.

**Medicinal Cannabis truly saved my Life, - please let me tell my story.**

I'm a 57 year old gent, divorcee, self-employed in a professional career, a significant amount of my career involves me driving to meet clients either at their work place or their residence, something I need to do to earn a living, maintain my business which I also employ 6 other staff in my business.

The mere fact that each and every day I'm forced to technically break the law with driving potentially with amounts of THC in my system has concerns for me.

In October 2019, I suffered a freak accident in severing my median nerve which controls effectively the functions of my left hand, initially loosing most of the function of that hand, over the past 2 plus years having had an immense amount of occupational therapy, starting on a weekly basis,. Moving to less frequency. The upshot of the injury was immense pain, in fact pain 24/7 with no relief, the pain certainly during that early stage of first year plus was just so intense, There was little way I could function as a basic human being little lone a professional career.

My GP prescribed a combination of Lyrica (Pregabalin) with Tramadol, these medications are opioid based, but are on what is called SR or slow release. I was on basically 300mg of Lyrica per day, which is well known in the medical fraternity as a good suitable pain medication for nerve injury. I would refer to Lyrica as a type of synthetic opioid, so it is impossible to really abuse, as it is a SR type of medication, I was taking 150 mg in the morning and 150mg in the afternoon, the medication is supposed to offer 12 hours pain relief, I was always lucky to get 8 hours, mind you, it really was only just taking the edge off, I was never pain free at all, just managing to try and live each day as it comes.

Having been in so much pain, anything was worth trying, so to speed this story up, only about 2-3 months in, I noticed a significant number of side effects, the first 2 in particular were significant short term memory loss, I mean it was just bizarre, I would forget virtually everything, if I had to go to Woolies or Bunnings to pick up let's say just 3 items, unless I wrote them down There was no way when I was at the shops I could remember why I was there. I just couldn't remember anything, unless I wrote a note for myself about every little thing, the second medical condition was, I lost the ability to even string a sentence together, which was extremely embarrassing, I would start a sentence, knew what I wanted to say, but simply couldn't articulate the last part of any conversation. On top of this the sweating was just insane, I would admit this body odour that meant I needed to change shirts sometimes 2 or 3 times a day, to a point I was fast running out of business shirts to wear in any one day, just crazy.

I was conscious enough to recognise these symptoms and started to do some research into Lyrica and found that the side-effects were in fact quite common, I did a lot of research into alternative types of medication, I mean an incredible amount of research. After a month or two of researching, all solutions were pointing to medicinal cannabis, also I found that switching Tramadol to Tapentadol (a similar drug, just more advanced and modern with less side effects), however the Tramadol, was really only effecting me with mild constipation, nothing too serious.

In relation to the research on Lyrica, that really was scary, it is a terrible opioid, which in my belief will be worse than the past opioid epidemic that Australia and the world has seen with the likes of oxycodone (never tried so can't comment).

Lyrica has an incredible amount of side effects, I've listed some of these and placed an asterix against the side-effects that I encountered.

#### Lyrica well known Side-effects

- Loss of memory \*
- Loss of speech ability to hold a conversation \*
- Brain fade \*
- Depression \*
- Suicide tendencies \*
- Muscle cramps \*
- Organ shut downs – mainly liver and kidney
- Blackouts \*
- Retina detachment
- Teeth loss due to cracking
- Zombie like features
- Insomnia \*
- Erectile dysfunction
- Organ failure
- Death
- Eye twitching \*
- Blurred vision
- Anger and behavioural changes
- Body twitching mainly at sleep \*
- Breathing difficulty
- Freezing sensation
- Stomach cramps and indigestion
- Hair loss
- Hallucinations

Heart rate change  
Gum pain  
Hearing loss  
IBS  
Motivation loss \*  
Nausea  
Sweating and severe night sweats \*  
Panic attacks  
Rashes  
Seizures  
Restless legs \*  
Loss of taste, smell  
Mouth ulcers and tooth decay  
Odour and body smell \*  
Sinus  
Tinnitus  
Vertigo  
Weight gain \*

Committee, this may seem like an extensive list, But it is only a short list of all the known side-effects. Weight gain is the most common, and most patients will experience that along with a whole amount of other symptoms.

So I was on the main dose of medication for 4 months until I made the decision to start to taper, for those of you who are unfamiliar with Lyrica, you can't just stop taking the medication, if you attempt to do that, it most certainly can end your life by way of a seizure which may lead to death or side-effects that would basically make life not worth living (The death rate of this medication in Australia is just staggering) (A number of countries recently have outlawed the medication such as Ireland) a normal taper suggests reducing 10% holding for 4 weeks then repeating the same, It took me a further 8 months to complete my taper, at and only at the conclusion of the Lyrica taper, I then decided to taper off Tapentadol, which after the Lyrica taper was a walk in the park.

Of the above side-effects I've placed a asterix next to, I want to highlight just a few, that being insomnia and suicide depression, the Insomnia was just insane, for a period of time, my life was a living hell, so my normal life was now 4 days and nights no sleep, lying in bed every night for 4 nights with not an ounce of sleep, not even 1 minute of sleep, then my whole body would crash and I'd sleep for 24 hours solid and I couldn't and didn't want to get out of bed. Then the whole process would start over again. The muscle twitching would catapult me out of bed onto the floor of my bedroom, in essence creating a situation of sleep deprivation.

The depression and suicidal tendencies were just insane, every day, I wanted to take my own life, however I quickly learnt how to control these and that was not allowing any negative thoughts to enter my brain, I had at least mastered this side-effect.

I do however want to concentrate on driving, so in that 4 + 8 month stint on Lyrica, I had a couple of scares, one was I was travelling south on Stirling Hwy, I suppose it was around Mosman Park area, coming up to the light's at Eric St, everybody in Perth knows only too well, there is a red light and speed camera at that intersection, I was travelling in moderate heavy traffic, in the left lane, all of a sudden it was like my body was transformed 10m off the ground still holding the steering wheel and trying to steer, and making sure I didn't mount the kerb on my left or hit vehicles in the right lane

next to me, that episode lasted most probably 5 – 10 seconds then back to complete normality, again some minutes later ditto with the dip in the road at Wellington St, exactly the same, I sailed through the intersection, this time it lasted less than about 5 seconds. At the time you have no real idea of what just happened, a month or so later, I was West bound on Russell Rd coming up to the Russell Rd East and West intersection, I was the first vehicle approaching the intersection, so safe, I remember depressing the brake, the next thing I woke up in the car, straddled across that intersection, I recall at the time it would have again only been 5 seconds or so, as the traffic lights for the Stock Rd traffic were just turning green, I felt extremely embarrassed, I just recall thinking that there were dozens of vehicles that must have been just looking at me they must have been thinking to themselves “what does this turkey think he is doing”

So I want to make the point to the Committee that these symptoms were all on what is called a safe drug for driving, heaven help, if I was an airline pilot or a bus driver as anything could have occurred.

I was later to learn that Lyrica actually stores in your body fat cells, so in effect what was happening is that you are taking a prescribed amount of the medication, your body then makes a decision as to what it will use and use over a 8 or supposedly 12 hour period and what your body stores away somewhere, like a beaver will store its acorn nuts for winter perhaps, then your body just dumps an immediate supply of the drug to your brain and this is what happens.

Back tracking what has helped me significantly is the Lyrica Survivors Group, (Fb Group) so there are 3 groups across the globe, one is global, one in Australia and one in the USA, I joined from an early start the global group which has tens of thousands of members and the smaller Australian group. The worldwide group is managed by a Dr Amy Ireland from the States, these groups give strength to the 100s of thousands of Lyrica victims around the globe, the Australian Group is really too small to make a real difference in my opinion, and doesn't have the correct resources, it is very sad to see so many patients not find enough information or assistance in that group.

So I've been 100% free of Lyrica for over 12 month now and during the final certainly 2 month so of taper which were meniscal dosages I've been fine, I now spend at least some time every day or at worst some time weekly helping many of the patients in that group along with many thousands worldwide, it is difficult to explain in words, but it gives me a greater purpose in life helping many of these patients across the world, unfortunately, a significant number of these victims due to their amount of dosages are beyond help and will most probably die and just add to the statistical use of this medication, most people take the triage opinion and unfortunately you can't help everybody – please note in any one day hundreds of patients will call out for help daily.

I want to point out I hold no malice against my GP or any GP for that matter in relation to that medication, they too are victims of miss-information from basically “Big Pharma”

OK – I could go on about Lyrica, but I will leave it there. I want to impress on the Committee as to the shoes I have been walking in and how I came to this point in my life

So I discovered medicinal cannabis, (MC) I want to point out that there are most probably 100,000 Australians currently on MC, and that is just in the very short 5 years since I think 2016 when it became legal in Australia. There are some 30+ ASX listed companies that are suppliers of MC in the Australian market.

So in April 2020 I was finally on MC, my medication is Little Green Pharma (LGP) Classic 10/10 which is an equal combination of CBD and THC. I take 2 mls nightly generally a few hours before bedtime.

As I have said in my opening statement Medicinal Cannabis (MC) saved my life. Since starting on the medication, and surviving Lyrica, my life has been put back on an equal footing, I managed to save my business, and basically live a normal life, pain has subsided significantly, all my above symptoms have all disappeared, I can't tell you how good it is to live without insomnia anymore, to not feel depressed, and to go to bed and not have those restless legs jolt you off the bed in the middle of the night.

Being on MC I have truly got my life back into order, I can't overstate that enough, it has been a life changing surviving experience.

Which brings me into why I'm so aggrieved with Government over MC and its availability, It is expensive, It is not covered on the PBS, you also don't even get the measly \$20 rebate health funds like HBF give for certain medications not on the PBS.

A large majority of patients just simply can't afford the cost of the medication, I currently can afford it, but need to make sacrifices to be able to afford the medication and some months it can be a financial burden, I'm sure you have heard of stories where patients need to access a certain type of medication that may not be on the PBS to basically save their life, they generally take out a second mortgage or sell the family home to afford the medication , whilst MC isn't that expensive, it is still well outside the reach of just so many Australians.

Presently I just don't know whether I will be on MC for the next 5 years, 10 years or for the rest of my life.

I would like to see our State Health Minister, Roger Cook work with his state counterparts in taking a significant argument to Canberra in a COAG prospective to force Canberra once and for all to embark on making MC part of the PBS, from an economical prospective MC has just so many advantages over many of the opioid and heroin based medications that are all supported by the PBS, so that MC can quickly find its way onto the PBS, in my opinion it make logical sense to be supporting local manufacturers and distributors like LGP and others instead of overseas Big Pharma companies that rip billions of dollars off Australia's PBS system.

So my LGP Classic 10/10 is an equal amount of CBD to THC, It is like the yin and yang effect, and this is where I get the most significant benefit in terms of pain relief, but to be honest now, it is about sleep and the causes of that past medication, has had such a diverse and damaging effect on my sleep, I need the combination, certainly with the THC to enable that to happen.

Symptoms, the only symptoms I have is slight dry mouth, of which I manage by using a Biotene gel at night before I go to sleep.

The amount of THC is in my view, a very mild amount, certainly not like the reefer effect I think many of us use to experience if we partook smoking weed during our school years or similar, it is just not like that. However arguable it would still show up in a road side drug test, which would mean that I would face loss of licence and loss of my business, livelihood and the livelihood of all my staff in my office.

I medicate MC every day , only at night around 9pm, it takes about 1-2 hours to take effect, I would personally just not step into a vehicle to drive after that medication, BUT I can assure the Committee by the morning when I awake I have no feelings of impairment whatsoever and quite competent of driving in any circumstances.

I hold a letter from my prescribing doctor in my glovebox, but aware it is not a legal excuse to drive legally.

I note that many countries around the world now allow whilst being prescribed MC. Australia is just so far behind where we ought to be on this scenario, I understand recently Tasmania now allows its citizens to drive with THC if on a MC script, - Why not WA.

### **Conclusion**

I have outlined to you, my experiences on the Lyrica medication and quite frankly the alarming only a few episodes I had, remembering it was only luck in many respects that I wasn't involved in a serious accident nor was anybody injured or killed by my actions that were in effect at the time completely lawful, but the medication and its past effects were not really fully understood at the time.

At the age of 57, I think I know my body, I know how I feel and I know my limitations, and when it comes to driving, I have full confidence in driving with the levels of THC as prescribed.

**I have always lived my life on the right side of the law and taught my children the same, respectfully State Governments have not kept pace with this issue whatsoever in allowing Australians to continue to be able to drive, there would be no way I would ever return to an opioid based medication like Lyrica or others just to get through Life.**

**I JUST WANT TO DRIVE LEGALLY AS I HAVE LIVED THE FIRST PART OF MY 55 YEARS – PLEASE ALLOW THAT TO HAPPEN.**

I'm more than happy to appear in front of the Committee at any point to answer any questions you have.

Stephen Knight