

Veterans, PTSD and Pot

Presented by Michelle Tippens, BA-CJS, MS-AJS

Co-Founder, Executive Director

Hawai'i Veterans Cannabis Alliance



Who am I?

Michelle Tippens

- ✦ Born in 1977 (41 years old)
- ✦ Houston, TX to Honolulu, HI
- ✦ Arrived in Hawaii August 2013
- ✦ Lived in 8 states, Visited >30
- ✦ Divorced, 4 children (18, 20, 22, 24)
- ✦ US Army Veteran, 97B (98-02)
- ✦ Arabic Linguist
- ✦ Honorable Medical Discharge
- ✦ 100% Disability, Service-Connected
- ✦ Graduate, Arabic Language Course
- ✦ Bachelor of Arts, Crime and Justice Studies, University of Texas, 2006
- ✦ Masters of Science, Administration of Justice and Security Systems, 2012
- ✦ Lobbyist/Politician in Hawaii (Libertarian)
- ✦ Published in 2 MMJ Magazines
- ✦ Spoke at 4/20 HT Cannabis Cup, 2015
- ✦ Executive Director and Co-Founder of Hawai'i Veterans Cannabis Alliance



My Weed Story (in brief)

Child (0-17)

- Raised in Texas
- Conservative
- DARE Program
- Tried twice
- Got sick x2
- Deduced allergy
- “Not for me”

Young Adult (18-30)

- Joined Army @ 20
- Definitely no Weed
- Disbelief in Efficacy
- Medical is a Fake Label
- Alcohol (3-5x week)
- Veterans Health Care
- 28 scripts, 85 pills/day
- Pulmonary Walker

Present (31-41)

- ❖ Friend w/Cancer
- ❖ Find Medical Benefit
- ❖ Smoke daily for a year
- ❖ Weight loss, Recovery
- ❖ Healthier Lifestyle
- ❖ Cannabis Activism
- ❖ Lost Fiance to PTSD
- ❖ Veterans Helping Veterans



HVCA Roots est. 2015

- ▶ 2015 - 22 a day released, Believed to be significantly underestimated
- ▶ Conclusive evidence shows cannabis effective for PTSD
- ▶ 2 veterans created Org
- ▶ IRS approved 501c19 on Aug 16, 2017
- ▶ 4 current chapters: Oahu (HQ), Kauai, Maui, Big Island
- ▶ Next chapter will be on Moloka'i
- ▶ Website is: HIVetsCan.org
- ▶ Goal: To reduce the frequency of PTSD and veteran-related suicide annually in America



PTSD and the Autonomic Nervous System

Sympathetic vs. Parasympathetic

Parasympathetic

- “Rest and Digest” System
- Body relaxes
- Recovery and Metabolic processes
- Slows the heart rate
- Increases intestinal and glandular activity
- Relaxes the sphincter muscles
- Decreases Pupil size
- Vasodilation
- The “Itis”



Sympathetic

- ❑ “Fight or Flight”
- ❑ Prepares for imminent danger
- ❑ Characterized by the release of large quantities of epinephrine from the adrenal gland
- ❑ Increased heart rate and cardiac output
- ❑ Skeletal muscle vasodilation
- ❑ Gastrointestinal vasoconstriction
- ❑ Pupillary and Bronchial Dilation

PTSD and the Sympathetic Nervous System

Symptoms

Flight - Agoraphobia

Flight - Procrastination

Fight - Sarcasm, Passive-Aggressive

Fight - “Micro-Managing”, Excessively Strict Parenting

Cause

Seeking control of environment to prevent access by unk aggressor

Avoiding uncomfortable situations or environments

Inability to trust others with feelings; Viewing emotions as weaknesses

Attempting to control environment to ensure safety



PTSD and the US Military

“These Colors Don’t Run!”

- War is a STRESSOR, initiates sympathetic nervous system
- “Fight or Flight” unacceptable in War
- Basic Training is designed to eliminate the “Flight” response
- “Fight” response is developed and shaped: Defend and Counterattack
- Effective for soldiers, ensures proper Wartime behavior
- Autonomic nervous system unable to differentiate between types of stressors
- Causes difficulty upon return from War; body reacts inappropriately
- Behaviors meant to create fear simply place Veterans into “Fight mode”
- Examples: Police Officers, Bar Security



Cannabis Affects

How does it work?

- ▶ Calms the Sympathetic Nervous Response
- ▶ Allows veterans to remain objective and 3rd person
- ▶ Reduces aggression, promotes contentment
- ▶ Relaxes user, reduces perceived environmental stress; i.e. “triggers”
- ▶ Provides Kuleana through cultivation
- ▶ Creates desire to connect and develop relationships with others
- ▶ Normalizes stress reaction
- ▶ Allows veterans to retrain CNS response



HVCA helping Veterans

How do we do it?

- ▶ 3 main areas: Cannabis, Camaraderie, Community Outreach
- ▶ Receptive and non-judgemental environment
- ▶ Informed answers, resource referrals
- ▶ Growing supplies, assistance, instruction
- ▶ Caregiver/Patient networking
- ▶ Recreational activities
- ▶ Community volunteering
- ▶ Shared perspective, understanding audience



QUESTIONS?

Website: HiVetsCan.org

Phone: 808-VET-PTSD
808-838-7873

