

Addressing Rising Expectations for Accurate Labeling and Dosing

By Guy Setton, Ph.D.



stakeholders who may find themselves liable for potency labeling errors and misleading consumers. If pharmaceutical corporations were to sell products with active ingredient variance like cannabis crops, class-action legal suits would soon arise. Inevitably, accurate potency labeling will be a top priority for retailers, if only for the reason of self-preservation.

The health industry still has a great deal to learn about the pharmacological role of the many active compounds found in cannabis. Companies may try to differentiate themselves in the market by highlighting a specific cannabinoid or terpene with little or no information about their efficacy. There is no point in confusing consumers

Q

How do we address concerns with medical cannabis, specifically with respect to dosing and labeling?

Accurate drug labeling is critically important for patient and consumer health, and medical cannabis is no exception. It is only a matter of time before cannabis products will be subject to the same regulatory scrutiny as other prescription drugs and dietary supplements. With patient safety a top priority, the authorities will seek to ensure that what is listed on the label is truly in the product. Unsurprisingly, the global cannabis testing market, which was valued at above US\$ 900 million in 2017, will experience double digit growth during the coming years and will surpass US\$ 1.5 billion in 2025 (Coherent Market Insights, 2018).

Right now, labeling accuracy remains a serious industry-wide challenge and a threat to consumer confidence. Studies published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 2015 and 2017 showed that cannabis products frequently over- or understate the cannabinoid content. About 68% of cannabis batches that failed regulatory testing this summer in California did so because of inaccurate labels, specifically overstating the amount of THC.

A lack of trust in labeling creates legitimate public health concerns, specifically when dealing with the psychoactive element THC. This should concern prescribing doctors and medically fragile end users. It should also be a warning to supply-chain

about compounds, especially those which exist in trace amounts before there is more knowledge about them. Therefore, for the time being, cannabis potency testing should focus on protecting public health starting by ensuring accurate analysis of the main cannabinoids, specifically providing dependable results for THC and CBD levels.

Reliable and affordable technology exists today for empowering cannabis players along the supply chain to better ensure the quality and safety of their products. For example, near infrared (NIR) technology is a well-established method, endorsed by the FDA for testing the quality of pharmaceutical products. The same technology, in combination with image analysis and advanced data analytics, can overcome the complex heterogeneous nature of cannabis to ensure that products have been produced to the right standard, with the correct ingredients, without requiring the physical destruction of a sample. Companies that adopt in-house testing to their standard operating procedures to ensure the quality of their production, will be those whose brands will be trusted most, command a premium in the market and shape the future of the industry.

Dr. Guy Setton is the CEO and co-founder of GemmaCert Ltd. (www.gemmacert.com) which specializes in cannabis analytics using spectroscopy, image analysis and data science. Guy has been involved in the health and nutrition industries for the past two decades fulfilling a range of international business development roles.