

ECS founder Seeks Cannabis Degree

ECS has always been an education-focused distributorship. Last year, ECS founder Jonathan Kennedy, decided to further his education with an MS in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy.

Kennedy isn't new to the field of cannabis. He has been involved with cannabis since 2006. Originally an engineer with a master's degree in nuclear engineering, Kennedy had doubts about the future of nuclear energy. When he heard stories about cannabis changing people's lives, he knew he wanted to be a part of this growing industry.

Kennedy spent years working as a lobbyist for NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), holding several positions in the North Carolina chapter. Those years with NORML were spent working hard to change laws but were ultimately unsuccessful. When Kennedy saw the 2013 CNN documentary "Weed", which showcased the Stanley Brothers company Charlotte's Web and how they were changing lives, he realized this would move the national cannabis conversation forward more than lobbying. He knew he wanted to be involved with that company.

Nationally, everything changed in 2015 - 2016 when the Controlled Substances Act was modified to allow "industrial hemp" to be shipped across state lines. Kennedy received a call from an acquaintance who was Charlotte's Web's only distributor, asking if he wanted to be the North Carolina distributor.

Because of his years of experience in cannabis and lobbying, Kennedy realized the way to change is through industry, and getting the product into people's hands and into their bodies, to show them what cannabis could do. He set up ECS Distribution as an

education-focused distributorship and partnered with retailers whose focus was health improvement, primarily independent pharmacies.

With CBD starting to boom, there was no real regulation or a way for retailers or consumers to sort the good products from the bad. ECS became focused on finding cannabis products that had a consistent profile of cannabinoids and met quality and safety standards.

As science has discovered and most of us already know, cannabis isn't a one size fits all solution. Each body is unique and each body's need for cannabis varies. So, in addition to finding quality products, helping retail partners understand and navigate the complexities is vital. Kennedy found that the pharmacists he interacted with had scientific questions. Though he's had years of self-study of cannabis, he felt unprepared to answer such complicated questions.

Kennedy's research into cannabis degree programs led him to the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, a top-tier institution, and its Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics program. The program stood out as offering the advanced education he was looking for compared to other programs teaching basic and intermediate information.

The three most useful courses have been pharmacokinetics & pharmacodynamics, evidence-based medicine, and pharmacognosy. Pharmacokinetics is the study of *what our bodies do to the drug*. Which enzymes break it down, how it gets distributed in the body, and how long it takes to get out of the body. Pharmacodynamics is the study of *what a drug does to our body*. What receptors it binds to, how potent it is, and what is its maximum effectiveness?

Evidence-based medicine moves from the theory to look at randomized controlled trials, studies, and dosing. This ties in well with ECS's partnership with Realm of Caring which has the largest cannabis patient registry in the world and is releasing data.

Pharmacognosy looks at different types of cannabis, how cannabinoids are made on the plant, and what to look for as far as the cannabinoid profile in the plant.

Kennedy has found these courses reinforce ECS's original business model of providing products that are safe and have a consistent profile of cannabinoids, as well as the model of educating retail partners as much as possible. Kennedy will graduate from the program in May of 2023, and says, "This will benefit everyone we work with because we can go deeper with explaining cannabinoids and making claims. We're helping the public become more informed. We're separating truth from legend."