

How the Today Show taught one doctor acceptance (of medical cannabis)



Published on: Jul 19, 2016 | by finfeed

Dr Ross Walker may be one of the key players at MGC Pharma (ASX:MXC) – but he wasn't always singing from the medical cannabis songsheet.

Reputed in Australia thanks to his media work, as little as 18 months ago he describes himself as "ignorant" of the benefits of medical cannabis.

He's currently serving as a non-executive director at MXC – so it's safe to say he's seen the light.

MXC is currently pursuing a way to alleviate the pain of those suffering epilepsy using a cannabinoid (CBD)-based solution.

It is early stages yet and this is a young stock, so if considering your investment options please seek professional financial advice.

CBD is a compound derived from medical cannabis – and MXC has been using the compound in a variety of ways – ranging from the cosmetic to the pharmaceutical, and has more recently signalled a [push into the Australian market](#).

In this exclusive Q&A with *Finfeed* he sat down to talk through what caused his about-face, about the outlook for MXC and medical cannabis in Australia more broadly.

Finfeed: *Thanks for sitting down with us today. So, first question, when exactly did you see the light on the role cannabinoids could play in the treatment of various diseases?*

Dr Ross Walker: It was actually around 18 months ago [when] I was asked to comment on medical cannabis on the *Today Show* on Channel 9.

When I researched the topic it was clear to me that there were significant benefits from this product.

FF: *So how has your perception of medical cannabis shifted in that time?*

RW: Prior to 18 months ago I was ignorant of the benefits of cannabinoids and was only aware of the significant bad health effects associated with the excessive use of THC.

FF: *Can you give us a run-down on what cannabinoids can be used to treat?*

RW: The uses of medical cannabis are varied and include refractory forms of epilepsy, many aspects of cancer treatment including prevention of nausea during chemotherapy, pain associated with cancer and there are even some potential benefits around reduction in growth and spread of tumours.

There is also some early work to suggest benefits for chronic pain in general, spasticity associated with multiple sclerosis and even some very promising laboratory and animal studies around chronic neurologic conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease.

There have been some preliminary promising reports for a variety of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus and psoriasis. Some early benefits are also suggested for alcohol induced brain disease and chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

Some studies have shown some promise for the use in psychiatric conditions such as depression and anxiety.

FF: *It's clear that in Australia the wheel is starting to turn in terms of medical cannabis and cannabinoid use – what do you think needs to be done to get to a point where MXC's product may end up on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme?*

RW: Once the legislation has been passed by Parliament, we will need to have commenced studies in a number of areas as suggested above to demonstrate the safety and benefits of medical cannabis.

This will need to be done before approval into the PBS.

FF: *Do you think the Australian government could be doing more to encourage companies like MXC?*

RW: To date the varying government bodies have all been supportive, but we do need more research in this area. Not just based on safety, but also [looking at] the right mix of cannabis and THC to achieve maximum therapeutic benefit.

FF: *Do you think cannabinoids have a role to play in supplementing existing therapies?*

RW: The availability of medical cannabis offers an entirely new aspect of the therapeutic armamentarium and recent trials out of the US have shown clearly that medical cannabis does reduce the risk of other more toxic drug therapies.

FF: *Are we in the middle of a revolution for CBD-based products?*

RW: I think the term 'revolution' is probably too strong, but I do believe that CBD based products and other forms of medical cannabis will be one of the next big things in medicine.

FF: *What are you seeing out there in the medical community? What needs to be done to get more doctors on board with CBD-based treatments?*

RW: If we can continue to present well designed research studies to the medical profession, there is no doubt they will come on board.

FF: *Where is this heading in Australia, in your opinion?*

RW: It is my opinion that the medical cannabis industry in Australia has the strong potential to provide a significant amount of employment both in the growth, cultivation, development and research sectors of the community.

FF: *Finally, why did you choose to get involved with MGC Pharma?*

RW: I became involved with MGC because I could clearly see that the Israeli experience in this area was much stronger than any other country hoping to introduce this therapy to Australia.

I also could clearly see the hiatus for effective but less harmful therapies in a raft of areas.