



WEIGHING THE PRO'S AND CON'S OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

by Lisa Rappale M.Ed RRT

Controversial issues in healthcare can stir some pretty murky water. Debates can go on for decades without political, legal, moral or ethical resolution. Good examples of controversial issues include medicinal marijuana and euthanasia. When researching these issues most information you see on the Internet will be swayed by the opinion of the writer or source. Research studies can be found to support both sides of a controversy as well.

I was curious to see if I could find an Internet resource that was bipartisan in its presentation of controversial issues. I looked at a lot of material on medicinal marijuana and it was all promoting one side or the other of the issue. Lawyers, politicians, physicians, research studies all had an opinion on the matter. Then I discovered ProCon.org.

ProCon.org is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, 501(c) (3) public benefit corporation. Their purpose is "to educate the public about controversial issues by presenting facts, news, and thousands of diverse opinions in a pro-con format." ProCon was originally founded in 1985 under the name Association of Media Accuracy. This was after the founder realized that even well-educated, knowledgeable people are misinformed on some controversial topics. He and a colleague began researching controversial topics of the time and publishing their findings. They published two booklets and changed the name to ProCon. They retired the idea for a few years. Then in 1994 ProCon founders became aware of the issue of medical marijuana. They again found that people had very passionate views on the matter but few people had sound information to base it on. With the emergence of the Internet they saw their opportunity to share their research and a website was developed; MarijuanaInfo.org. The name was later changed to ProCon.org and more controversial topics were researched and added.

Current topics being presented at the website that are medically related are medical marijuana and legalization of euthanasia. Other controversial topics address the ACLU, whether gays are born that way, whether felons should be allowed to vote, the Israelis & Palestinians, legalizing prostitution, the "Under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, the U.S. & Iraq, and voting machines. The topics in development are: Milk (September 2007), 2008 Presidential Election (October 2007), Immigration (November 2007), Global Warming (March 2008), Death Penalty (March 2008), and Alternative Energy (April 2008). ProCon has developed its own credibility rating scale, which they use to rank each

source of information they present. This is to assist the reader in formulating their own opinion about the credibility of what they are reading. Though it isn't an exact science, it does help the reader to evaluate the sources of information and compare one to the other. ProCon feels that this system is probably accurate 80% of the time. They base the credibility scale ranking on the education level and knowledge of the source of the information. This is similar to what the court system does. The scale is a one-to-five star ranking. Each topic of controversy has its own credibility ranking scale customized to the topic being presented. For example, medical marijuana ranks medical specialists higher because of their medical expertise, whereas voting machine experts rank higher in that topic of controversy (www.votingmachineprocon.org). Large organizations tend to rank lower because it is hard to target the individual source within the organization. A full explanation of the ranking system can be accessed from the homepage of ProCon or the homepage of any controversy. (Look for "Theoretical Credibility")

The website is very easy to navigate, the format very easy to follow. The "Pro" information is always presented in the left-hand column of tables and the "Con" information in the right-hand column. ProCon disclaims this setup as being preferential to the "Pro" views. It is just a consequence of circumstance. They point this out early on so the reader is aware of it. The homepage lists each current controversy in alphabetical order. The latest information on current topics is in a section below the topic list. So if you have already read extensively on a topic at the site, you can look there for anything new that is being added. After 30 days these items are added to the area of controversy.

When you choose a topic you are taken to a home page for that topic. For Medical Marijuana the website is www.medicalmarijuanaprocon.org the other topics are web-addressed similarly. Here you can decide how much time you want to spend on a topic. In the left-hand column there is a one minute overview or a 10 minute summary. Or you can choose what aspect of the topic you want to look at such as state laws, the history, or research data. You can also look at little known facts on the subject. (For example: "In 1978 the U.S. government started the Compassionate Investigational New Drug (IND) pro-

About patient care providers such as nurses and therapists

The literature suggests that many nurses and other allied health care professionals are codependent. So much so that one is led to believe that codependency is a requirement for entry into a health care profession. In my mind that's going too far, but I do believe that health care professionals - just as all other people - can be hurt and that they too, need healing. It would be wonderful, of course, if we could support one another through the process. Perhaps understanding what is going on can help us help ourselves, help one another and eventually help our patients/clients to heal. The healing has to start somewhere. Why not with ourselves?

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process is solely for gathering information, neither a preliminary nor final accreditation decision will be rendered at its conclusion. The facility should receive notice within 30 to 40 days of its final status. There are three levels of accreditation awarded; full accreditation, full accreditation with distinction, both of which are for a period of three years, and deferred accreditation, which is good for up to 12 months, in which time the center must successfully address specific issues identified during the survey. As with any accreditation survey, there is a great deal of preparation time and energy spent to achieve a successful outcome. There is also the satisfaction and pride received when the goal of accreditation is achieved. For the next article I will examine the specifics in the survey process in more detail and discuss my own survey experience.

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gram. Although closed for new patients in 1991, it still supplies about 300 marijuana cigarettes monthly to each of the seven seriously ill patients remaining in the program.") Moving from the left-hand column to the main section of the page you find the topic broken down into a list of headings and sub-headings. By clicking on a sub-heading you will be taken to a list of pertinent questions. Using this Q & A format materials are presented, both pro and con, in tables with credibility rankings for each item. You can always navigate back to the main page or to another heading. Each Q & A pops up in a new window, so be sure to close the windows when you are done. I find this to be a nice feature so you don't lose your way.

The information is extensive. ProCon uses a staff of researchers and senior researchers to collect, rank, and compile the data. I think you will find this a very interesting and informative site to visit for what ever controversy you may be interested in. They are very open to feedback, criticism, support and comments so as to improve the site.

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