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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

Brighton clinic to be among first in area specializing in physician-issued medical marijuana recommendations

Posted by Matt Rocheleau March 14, 2013 12:12 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A clinic opening in Brighton next month will be among the first in the Boston area to specialize in offering physician-issued recommendations that allow qualified patients to grow their own medicinal marijuana, a practice newly legalized under state law.

The Holistic Clinic plans to open Monday, April 1 in a third-floor office suite at 1505 Commonwealth Ave., said owner Richard Comenzo.

People suffering from conditions that make them eligible to use marijuana for medicinal purposes will be able to schedule an appointment to meet with a physician, who can write a recommendation.

Such written recommendations allow patients to grow their own marijuana, up to "a 60-day supply," according to state law.

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Changes could come when the state's Department of Public Health hands down formal regulations over how medical marijuana can be cultivated, distributed, obtained, and used.

State officials [said this week](#) a draft version of those regulations are expected to be unveiled by the end of March and could be implemented by the end of May.

Once the regulations go into effect, Comenzo said he expects written recommendations will continue to allow patients to grow marijuana and will also allow them to obtain state-issued registration cards, which would be required for patients to buy medicinal marijuana from dispensaries.

No registration cards will be issued and dispensaries will not be allowed to open until the regulations are implemented, state officials have said.

Comenzo said that while no one can guarantee what rules will be set, he expects the state will continue to recognize patient recommendations that are written before the regulations go into effect.

He said he also believes that dispensaries in Rhode Island, under that state's law, can accept written recommendations that Massachusetts physicians can currently issue.

Businesses similar to the clinic Comenzo plans to open have [announced their intentions](#) to open elsewhere in Massachusetts. [Some](#) have not been well-received by residents and municipal leaders.

Comenzo said that patients seeking a recommendation from his clinic will undergo thorough evaluations with physicians to prove they have a condition that qualifies them to be able to use medicinal marijuana under state law.

The evaluations will include a physical examination, a review medical records and periodic follow-ups, he said.

"We are going to pride ourselves in making sure that bona fide patient-physician relationship is real and done in the utmost professional manner," Comenzo said.

Evaluations are free but patients will be charged \$200 to have a recommendation issued to them, if they are found to be qualified, according to

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recommendation issued to them, if they are found to be qualified, according to [the clinic's website](#). Renewals of the recommendation are required annually and cost \$100.

He said that the clinic plans to offer other services in holistic medicine. The clinic has established partnerships to refer patients seeking services such as acupuncture and reflexology.

"The marijuana certification is just one of the many services we will offer," Comenzo said. "We will offer a melding between Western medicine and holistic medicine."

"It's for the public welfare," he added. "We believe that kind of combination will enhance the public welfare."

Comenzo said he suffers from a debilitating condition that would make him eligible to use medicinal marijuana under state law. He asked that the condition not be published.

He said that since medical marijuana became legal in Massachusetts, he has gone to numerous doctors to ask if they could write him a recommendation for his condition. But he said they all refused, often because they were afraid they might get themselves into legal trouble, especially if they wrote a recommendation before state regulations are finalized.

Comenzo, an attorney, said he has been practicing law for about 25 years, including a substantial stretch of criminal defense work and has become well-versed in the state's legalization of medicinal marijuana.

"Most people will look at it as I'm a lawyer and I'm in it to make money," said Comenzo. "But my real incentive was my personal experience. I want to be able to help make medicinal marijuana available to more people who can benefit from it and to help educate people about the process."

He said he expects to start off with a staff of one doctor who specializes in pain management, a nurse practitioner, a receptionist and office manager and Comenzo would help answer patients' legal questions.

He expects to hire more staff if there is sufficient demand and may seek to open additional clinics if the Brighton location outgrows its office space.

Comenzo said the clinic would not seek to incorporate a dispensary. He said the clinic is a for-profit operation and that state law requires dispensaries to be nonprofits.

Plus, having one entity issuing patient recommendations and selling marijuana would create a conflict of interest, he said.

Medical marijuana was legalized by a ballot measure that Massachusetts voters passed in November.

People with the following conditions can seek permission to use medical marijuana: cancer; glaucoma; AIDS; hepatitis C; amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS; Crohn's disease; Parkinson's disease; multiple sclerosis and "other conditions as determined in writing by a qualifying patient's physician," according to the state's health department.

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