

Montel Williams: Israel leads in medical marijuana

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Emmy Award-winning television personality Montel Williams speaks during an interview with the Associated Press in Jerusalem, Sunday, Oct. 30, 2011. Williams says Israel is at the forefront of providing patient access to medical marijuana. Williams was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1999. He has since been an outspoken advocate of medical marijuana to relieve pain caused by disease. (AP Photo/Sebastian Scheiner)

(AP) -- Emmy Award-winning television personality and patient activist Montel Williams said Sunday he was impressed with Israel's liberal attitude toward medical marijuana, and he believes the U.S. could learn a thing or two from the Jewish state.

Williams was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1999 and he has since

been an outspoken advocate of medical marijuana to relieve [pain](#) caused by the disease.

The former host of the popular long-running talk show "The Montel Williams Show" is in Israel on a fact-finding mission to learn about its medicinal cannabis practices. He is meeting with legislators, scientists and physicians.

At the height of his TV career, Williams was one of the most recognizable faces in America alongside fellow daytime TV hosts [Oprah Winfrey](#), Phil Donahue and Geraldo Rivera.

"We need to get out of the dark ages and into the new ages," he told The Associated Press. "Not every patient can use cannabis, but for those who can - why deny it?"

In Israel, certain doctors can approve cannabis prescriptions and disperse them to patients, said Itay Goor-Aryeh, the head of the pain management unit at the Sheba Medical Center in central Israel.

He said that while marijuana use is strictly regulated, many doctors prefer prescribing it to patients who qualify because it is "the lesser of evils."

"Those patients, if they do not get cannabis, they will get morphine-like drugs and other harmful drugs," said Goor-Aryeh. "I think that in many ways, cannabis is tolerated and is less addictive than morphine-based drugs."

Sixteen U.S. states have decriminalized the use of [medical marijuana](#) to some extent. Critics claim dispensaries are often no more than [drug trafficking](#) fronts.

Williams said that those merely seeking to smoke pot won't go through the lengthy bureaucratic process when they could just "go down the street."

Williams, 55, said he takes cannabis on a daily basis.

"For me, there is nothing else that can do what it does," he said. "It helps me suppress my pain ... When I am not using [cannabis](#) I am thinking about my pain every 45 seconds."

He said the drug has been "vilified to substantiate the false reason why it was banned in the first place," and that he hoped it would one day become a regular prescription drug.

"There are chemicals within that plant," he said, "and some of the leading science on where and how those chemicals work is being done right here in this country," referring to Israel.

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