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**Transcript:** AMA President Dr Michael Gannon, Sky News, Tuesday 13 June 2017

**Subjects:** Medicinal cannabis

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Earlier I spoke with the President of the AMA, Dr Michael Gannon. I asked him if he shares the Health Minister's concerns.

Michael Gannon, thank you for your time. The Health Minister, Greg Hunt, said today the move by the Senate was reckless; would you agree with that?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Yeah, we're disappointed with this move. What the Minister already knows a lot about and what the jurisdictions have seen is that doctors are reluctant to prescribe medicinal cannabis. This is no different to any other new drug, new technology, new operation; we want to be assured of the safety, assured of the effectiveness.

So you've already got a situation where doctors are querying exactly how effective medicinal cannabis is. If you in any way put any doubt in their minds about the safety, you're simply not going to see it prescribed by many doctors.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** What are the risks for patients?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, certainly, in the palliative care setting, we're not worried about addiction and, to be honest, we're not too worried about major potential side effects. But we remain concerned about potential diversion into the general community.

And let's not forget, we're talking about cannabis, we're talking about a substance that, used in the form it's used by most people, is a major source of mental illness in our community. It's absolutely essential that we're assured that whatever's being brought into the country, whatever's being brought in for prescription is safe – even if we're talking about its use in the palliative care setting.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** So for patients who would like to access medicinal cannabis, just how easy or difficult is that to happen? You mentioned that doctors are very reluctant to prescribe it; if they do, how easy is that process to actually get underway?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, we're satisfied with the process being put in chain by Minister Hunt and the Government using the Therapeutic Goods Administration, using appropriate care and diligence that is used for all other therapeutic products.

The Australian community would be outraged if prescription medication was rushed in, if someone said that it was okay to use. The Australian people would be outraged if new operations got brought in or, for that matter, new foodstuffs were brought in without appropriate care and safety.

Why would we possibly have a different rule when it comes to cannabis? We can't put the cart in front of the horse; the TGA's got a process in place, let's support that careful process to make sure what is used is perfectly safe.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** You mentioned that you were happy to see exceptions made, essentially for terminally ill patients, but what does the research tell us about the effectiveness of cannabis for others who aren't terminally ill, who are just looking for relief?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, we're not talking about a new substance that was discovered in the last five years, we're talking about a substance that's been known across the planet for hundreds of years.

The simple fact remains, if cannabis was the panacea that the people who seem desperate to import it - if it really was that good, then it would be in liberal use across the entire medical system. We're excited about its potential in palliative care, we're excited about its potential when it comes to juvenile epilepsy, and forms of spasticity, but let's look for the evidence.

We must look at this substance the same way as we look at every other form of therapy, every other new operation, every other new procedure. If doctors are convinced of its effectiveness and they're convinced of its safety, well then, very simply, they will use a new technique, they will use a new medication.

**ASHLEIGH GILLON:** Michael Gannon, appreciate your thoughts. Thanks for joining us.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Thank you, Ashleigh.

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