

## Workplace Headaches

The campaign against the use of illegal substances in Barbados in the workplace, follows on the heels of that where the focus was centered on the consumption of alcoholic beverages by employees. The worrisome thing about an individual who reports for work having used an illegal substance, is the impact that it may have on the individual psychologically, emotionally, physically and the ability to think and act rationally. This can easily be applied to those individual employees who on consuming a quantity of an alcoholic beverage, becomes intoxicated. Based on observations, it would seem that the consumption of alcoholic beverages is now commonplace amongst the youth and older demographic. It is therefore questionable if and to what extent the fight against alcoholism in the workplace has been won.

The concern expressed by the National Council for Substance Abuse (NCSA) in Barbados of the need to bring awareness about drug use in the workplace, tends to suggest that a problem is emerging that ought to be hastily addressed. If there was any doubt about this, the statement attributed to Troy Wickham, Deputy Manager, NCSA, confirms the need for action to be initiated, where the emphasis is on both preventative and corrective measures.

“According to NCSA’s deputy manager Troy Wickham, “We at the Council, in an attempt to be proactive, will take our programming into the workplace for the next few months, and we will start with drug awareness month,” he said, adding that the NCSA was equipped to conduct rapid assessments to determine whether there was substance abuse or drug use in the workplace and to assist with developing workplace drug policies. The NCSA recent made the observation that, “this will encourage staff and employers to embrace persons and help them reintegrate back into the workforce to become productive citizens. We know that as the onset of COVID and stressors, persons tend to lean on substances and this can impact their productivity in the workplace.” (Anesta Henry, 10 January, 2023)

In a country where its people as its human resource is the most value asset, the thought of incurring declining productivity on account of persons fitness and availability to work, is almost frightening. It is questionable whether the problem that is now being face, is to be attributed solely to the pressures of life. Some may wish to ponder over whether the decriminalization of the use of cannabis in Barbados although it remains illegal, has not contribute to the increase in its use. Is it that the legalization of the use of cannabis for recreational in Canada and throughout the United States of America and the legalization of it for medical use in Barbados has given persons a sense of freedom to exercise their choice?

Many would recall the international fight to impose a ban on cigarette smoking. The compromise was reached that the Surgeon General would have cigarette manufacturers’ issue the warning to consumers that cigarette smoking was dangerous to one’s health. At the end of the day, the choice to smoke remained that of the individual. Subsequent legislation such as the Safety and Health at Work Act in Barbados, prohibits smoking within buildings. While smoking not prohibited on the

inside of a workplace, it is interesting to know how employers would respond in the instance where an employee exercises the choice to smoke cannabis while on the outside by yet on the premises of the workplace; and who cites the grounds of medicinal use .

Some employers and employees may not easily identify an employee who is a cannabis user, simply because the individual does resort to smoking the substance. The fact that it can be used in other forms, the problem comes in not knowing the effect its use in these alternate forms, can have on an individual.

With all the uncertainty which exists about the use of cannabis for medicinal purposes, and moreover about the impact the drug in its various forms can have on a habitual user, this underlines the importance for the commencement of a structured education to highlight the dangers of drug use.

The biggest problem which employers and management may now have to treat to, is that of how to impose disciplinary action on an employee whose uses cannabis at the workplace, and who makes the claim that the use is for medicinal purposes.