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Wholistic ReLeaf: Empowering Families and Patients to Choose the Best Treatment Approach

BY DANIEL CASCIATO

Dr. David Berger

With over 20 years of experience as a board-certified pediatrician and wholistic family care physician, Dr. David Berger came to the medical cannabis industry with a level of knowledge and experience unparalleled among cannabis-certifying physicians.

Dr. Berger is the founder of Tampa-based Wholistic ReLeaf, the medical cannabis division of his full-service practice, Wholistic Pediatrics & Family Care. He named the cannabis clinic Wholistic ReLeaf because it combines the elements he believes are most important for providing patient-centered medical cannabis education and treatment.

"Wholistic is a term I have always used to describe the type of medicine I practice because it emphasizes the importance of considering the whole patient, the whole environment, and the whole community in effectively treating each patient." He continued, "Using the word 'leaf' credits the cannabis plant as the source which provides our patients the relief they seek."

Long before medical cannabis became a legal treatment option, Dr. Berger used herbs and other supplements to successfully treat his patients. Early in his career, he began creating individual dosing protocols for herbs and other supplements based on the patient's age and medical condition. When medical cannabis became legal in the State of Florida, for Dr. Berger it was just another herb with medicinal properties. It was second nature for him to determine the best dosing strategies and educate patients on safely introducing CBD and THC.

"I have long believed in the medicinal properties of cannabis. In fact, my interest dates back to the first paper I wrote in college," he recalls. "When the Florida law passed in 2016 that allowed full medical cannabis to be used, I was one of the first physicians to become certified in the Tampa Bay Area. I am also told that I was the first pediatrician to be certified in the State of Florida."

When Dr. Berger reflects on the number of patients medical cannabis has helped over the past few years, he is amazed at how many different medical conditions can be improved using this versatile herb.

"I have patients who suffered from severe, long-term seizure disorders who are now seizure free and no longer need seizure medications. I have patients who successfully weaned off antidepressants and anxiety medications," he says. "Teens with autism who seemed destined to need placement in residential facilities because of violent behaviors, are now able to safely stay home with their families. And patients with chronic pain have been able to get off of highly addictive opioid prescriptions. The list goes on and on."

Wholistic ReLeaf is dedicated to helping patients achieve optimal health and happiness through a caring, knowledgeable approach to medical cannabis education and treatment. They empower families and patients to choose the best treatment approach for the patient's medical condition; and, are devoted solely to the evaluation, certification, and treatment of qualified patients who meet the State of Florida legal requirements for receiving medical cannabis.

In late September, Wholistic ReLeaf will open a newly renovated suite within Wholistic Pediatrics & Family Care that is dedicated solely to providing comprehensive care for cannabis patients.

Under Wholistic ReLeaf's new education-centered model, in addition to being evaluated by the certifying physician, each patient meets one-on-one with the clinic's Patient Educator. During the education session, patients learn about routes of administration and dosing strategies based on the physician's recommendations, are shown samples of various products offered by the dispensaries, and review in detail all the steps required by the State to be certified and remain in compliance with ever-changing state laws. The Patient Educator is also available when questions arise between certification appointments, which are required by law every 7 months.

There are several factors that distinguish Dr. Berger's medical cannabis clinic. First, he is the most experienced physician in Florida who specializes in pediatric cannabis therapy. As a result, he can approach children with a level of expertise that other physicians lack. Additionally, because of Dr. Berger's pediatric background, his approach to patient care is naturally rooted in compassion, tenderness, and developing long-term relationships with patients and their families.

"For the past twenty years my sub-specialty has been autism and

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related disorders," he says. "In working with people with special needs and caring for those with chronic conditions, I came to realize that some people are really struggling every day; they may not be having a good day, good month, or good year. As a team, we strive to provide the most comprehensive service possible while also being sensitive to the individual needs of each patient."

Wholistic ReLeaf was also one of the first clinics in Florida to develop a database for drug interactions relative to cannabis. This allows the Wholistic ReLeaf doctors to cross check all of a patient's medications for known interactions with cannabinoids, and discuss options during the appointment.

Dr. Berger has seen very few patients over the years who did not tolerate medical cannabis. He is pleased to report that the most commonly seen "side effect" is the patient's need to reduce other medications. "Through the years, I've had wonderful feedback from patients who have been treated with medical cannabis," he says. "It reinforced my long-standing belief that a patient, under the proper guidance of a physician, should be empowered to consider the potential benefits versus potential risks of any treatment approach. Our goal is to help patients and their families utilize medical cannabis to get progressively closer to their healthcare goals."

For more information, visit wholisticreleaf.com.