

Re: Kratom recent change to a felony charge

Attention: Legislative Body of North Dakota

Hello!

I hope this finds you well. I have been a mental health professional for 12 years. I am currently a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and have been for over 8 years.

I frequently work very closely with patients, who have a history of opioid dependency. I have seen a high number of patients with a history of heroin, Fentanyl and opioid pill addiction. I've seen patients maintain sobriety for decades, due to kratom use. It has saved countless lives.

I understand the legitimacy of your choices to change the laws. However, making Kratom a felony has forced our ND population to either possess Kratom illegally or go back to using heroin or Fentanyl, which currently carries the exact same legal consequences. We currently average up to 130 deaths from opioid use in ND every year. The cases in which kratom causes death is primarily due to polypharmacy, in combination with other substances.

This is a public health emergency. Kratom users have the options to either withdrawal or commit a felony. Kratom is commonly used for pain control. We are expecting a significant increase in illicit drugs (Fentanyl, Heroin, etc), which will flood our ERs and increase death in this state. Outlawing kratom is a serious public health emergency. The personal medical experience I have gives me certainty that this will hurt, and likely kill more people in our state. I value my fellow North Dakotans too much to not speak up.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you consider my professional opinion when making your final decision.

Ashley LaBanca, PMHNP-BC