MDMA advocate seeks legalization of the drug

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SARASOTA — Laid-back, psychedelic lobbyist Rick Dobbin thinks an illegal drug made from the oil of nutmeg could help bring peace to the world.

To be sure, the Sarasota resident would add in his soft voice, that would be the ultimate goal of the altered space — the would make it a prescription drug along the lines of Xanax for people who need to calm their minds.

For starters, Dobbin would like to use the drug for terminal cancer patients and for those in counseling to break down emotional barriers.

In fact, he would like to start his own clinic in Sarasota, where the drug could be experienced.

The U.S. government, however, describes MDMA as dangerous and mysterious and has outlawed its use except in research as of July 1. For the first time since its origin in 1914 as an appetite suppressant, MDMA, or 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine — is now a Schedule 1 drug. That puts it in the same class as heroin and LSD, and means the drug has no medical use.

Dobbin is MDMA’s leading lobbyist.

He has been campaigning all summer to put MDMA on the Schedule 3 rung, which would make it a prescription drug for people who need it.

He has been talking about all three states this year, New York, New Jersey and Los Angeles, have asked him to coordinate a show in the last 10 months, he is scheduled to do a talk show in Philadelphia.

But Dobbin is not the bureaucratic, law-abiding, lobyist type, nor the flamboyant robe-dwelling Timothy Leary of the 1960s.

The drug was being abused on the streets, they say.

"The more we look into this, the more and more people we find who have experienced problems," Sapienza said.

According to DEA statistics, two people have died from the drug.

Even ignoring the street use, Sapienza said government officials do not think psychiatrists should be dispensing the drug, as some had been doing for the last decade, without knowing its dangers.

In contrast to his reputation, Dobbin said he does not think psychiatrists are for everyone and he does not advocate using them just to have a good time.

On the other hand, says the drug, which costs about $10 a "hit" or dose, should not be restricted, not even as a prescriptive Schedule 3 drug, which would limit its use to medicine only.

Dobbin says the drug should be used by those who want to learn and experience.

Sapienza, of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Washington D.C., thinks Dobbin and other advocates of the drug, are dreaming.

"They're well-meaning but naive," he said.

When you listen to some of these people, they're going to admit people are taking MDMA for curiosity, a good time, creative writing. These aren't really good uses.

Sapienza and other DEA and Federal Drug Administration officials say that there may very well be a legitimate use of the drug. But because MDMA has not been clinically tested to FDA’s approval, no one really knows its effects on the body.

According to the government and a University of Chicago study it used in its arguments to place MDMA on Schedule 1, MDMA causes damage to nerve terminals in the brain.

"The American public and the American government is not ready for this, despite the good intentions," he said.