

2016-32:Chris Wallace vs Toronto Star

*For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint that a columnist misinformed readers by suggesting that marijuana purchased from dispensaries is not Black Market product.

Complainant Chris Wallace says that in a June 2, 2016 Toronto Star article, “Both medical and recreational pot should be acceptable: Cole”, columnist Desmond Cole made statements with health and public safety implications that should be corrected. In particular, he says the columnist intimated that marijuana in dispensaries is not a product of the black market. He describes that suggestion as “misinformed” and in need of correction.

The article by opinion writer Desmond Cole cites the widely-reported police raids on Toronto marijuana dispensaries as he looks at the government’s role in differentiating between medical and recreational use of marijuana. He argues for erasing the stigma around marijuana use, and notes that differentiation of marijuana users has wide-ranging impact on users and society.

The article raises the issue of public health and safety in reference to fears that lack of dispensaries will drive marijuana users to street dealers. The column does not make definitive statements about the sources of marijuana sold by dispensaries.

In its response, the paper disagreed that the columnist is intimating the source of dispensary marijuana. It points out that the writer is not stating fact, but expressing his own view.

In researching the complaint, the NNC found that Health Canada reports 18 authorized licensed producers supply medical marijuana. The Canadian Association of Medical Cannabis Dispensaries has certification standards for supply of product, including product quality, inventory management, and supply accountability.

In dismissing the complaint, the NewsMedia Council notes that public health and safety are the concerns of both the opinion writer and the complainant. Both the writer and complainant offer opinion but no evidence about the source of product. The NewsMedia Council finds the opinion writer did not breach journalistic standards by stating a position on a controversial issue.