

Introduction

An online Reddit community, *FLmedicaltrees*, began in 2017 as a space for Florida medical cannabis patients to discuss laws, doctors, treatment, and products. The community has more than 54,000 members and several daily posts. Social networking theory and social exchange theory guided the study. The purpose was to look at patients' contamination experiences, knowledge, and feelings toward the medical cannabis system.

Research questions:

1. What are medical cannabis patients' experiences with contaminated products?
2. What are patients' knowledge levels of contaminants found in medical cannabis products?
3. What are patients' feelings towards the current state of the medical cannabis program in Florida?
4. What changes do patients want to see made to the Florida medical cannabis program?

Methods

A qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) of patients' posts about contaminated cannabis products using specific key words (*mold*, *contaminate*, *fiber*) to identify and collect contaminant-related posts during June 2022. The lead researcher screened posts (n = 300) for relevancy to the research questions and arrived at a final sample (n = 98). The three lead researchers developed a coding framework that included deductive codes such as *contamination concern*, *information seeking*, and *providing information*, and added inductive codes such as *not concerned with contamination*, *similar experience*, and *personal stories*. The lead researcher was the primary coder. Second and third researchers reviewed 20% of the coded posts to confirm accuracy.

Results

Theme 1:

Patients experience multiple forms of contamination throughout different products purchased from medical cannabis dispensaries.

Theme 2:

Patient knowledge levels of contaminants appear to be low, and this community is used to help find answers and second opinions.

Theme 3:

Some patients expressed feelings of anxiety and worry about health, safety, and quality control, while others had a lack of concern.

Theme 4:

Patients want changes regarding vertical integration, company accountability, state oversight, and home grow law.

Medical cannabis contaminants concerns: A qualitative content analysis of Reddit posts

Spandau, G., Loizzo, J., Fichtel, H., Pearson, B., Bunch, C. J., Stedman, N. (2023)

Medical cannabis patients' on Subreddit *FLmedicaltrees* share images and information about product contamination experiences. Many have safety concerns and call for more oversight in Florida's medical cannabis industry.

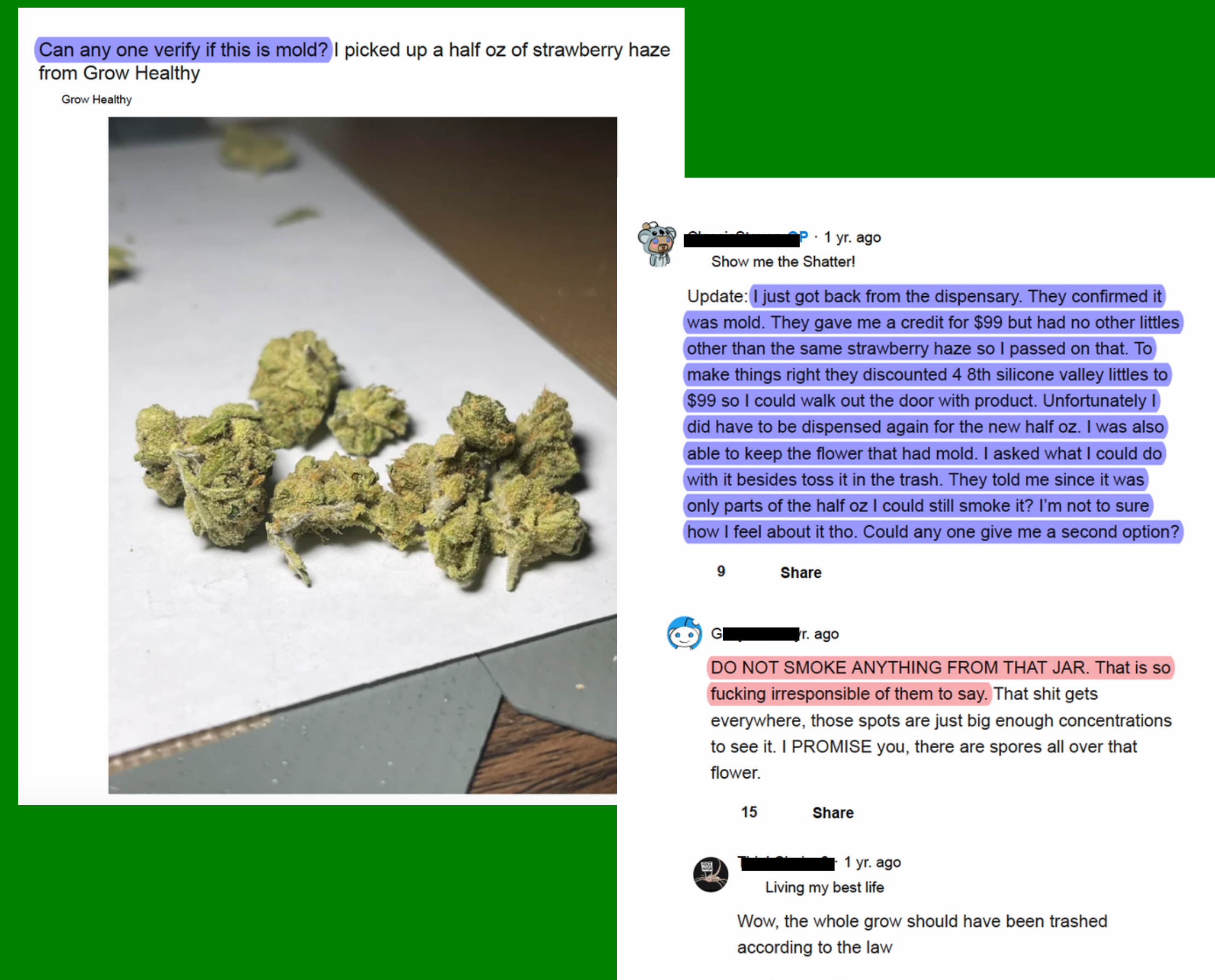


Figure 1: A post made by a patient who thought they saw mold on their cannabis.

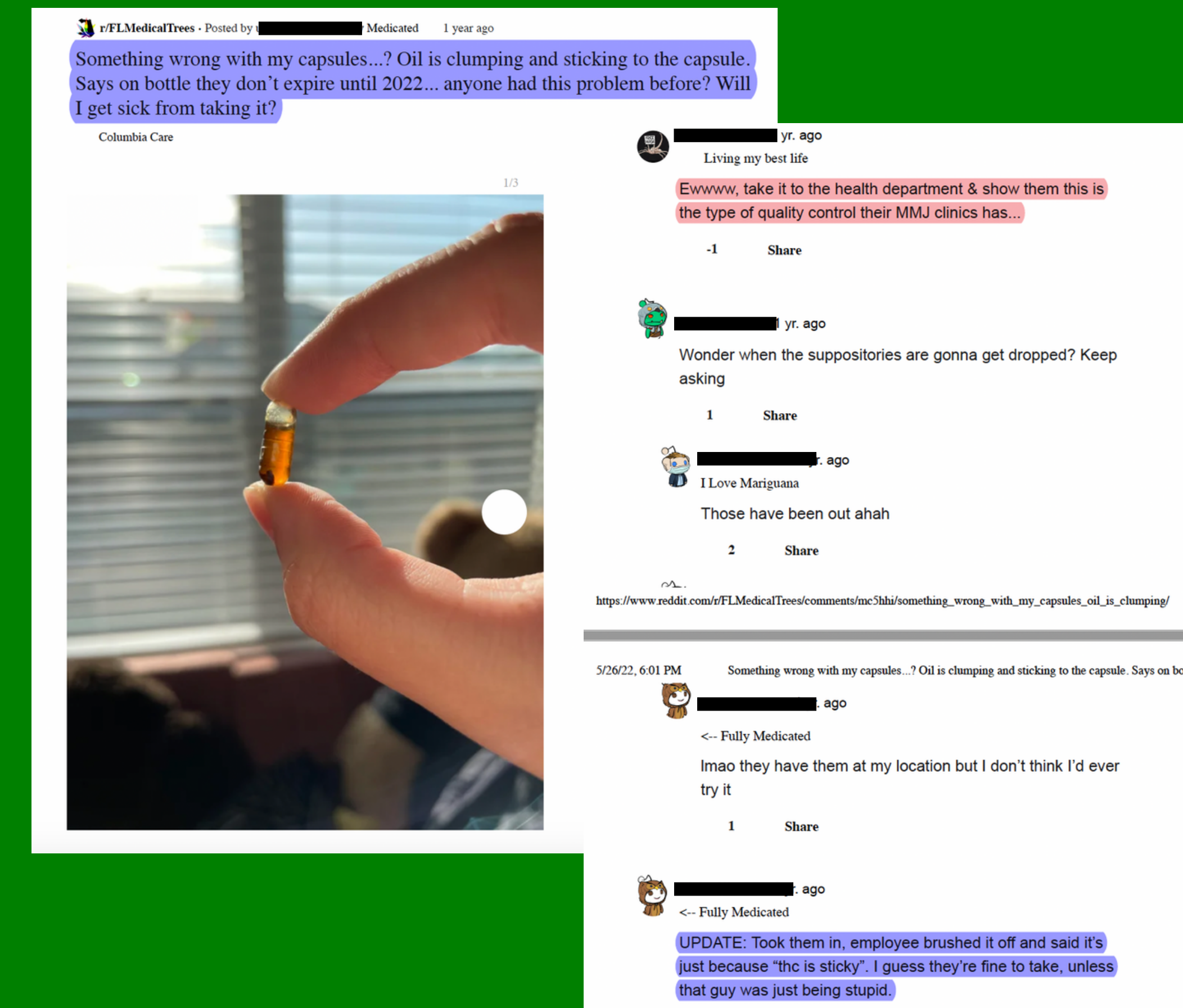


Figure 2: A post about a possible contaminant floating in a patient's capsule, more quality control comments, and a story of a dispensary's unwillingness to help.

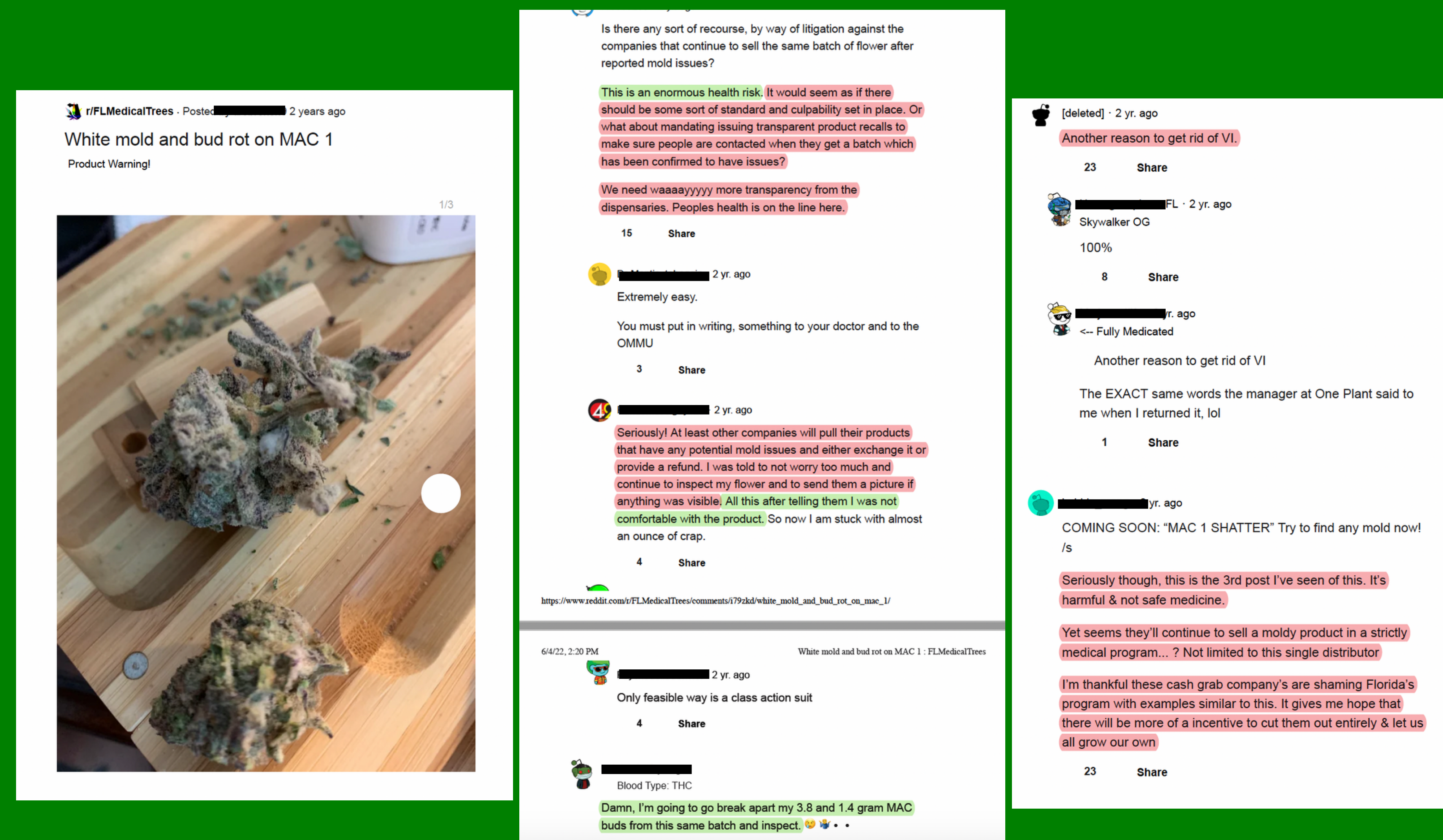


Figure 3: A patient believed they found mold on their cannabis, and commenters discussed health risks and lack of company accountability.

Demonstration of Themes through Data Codes

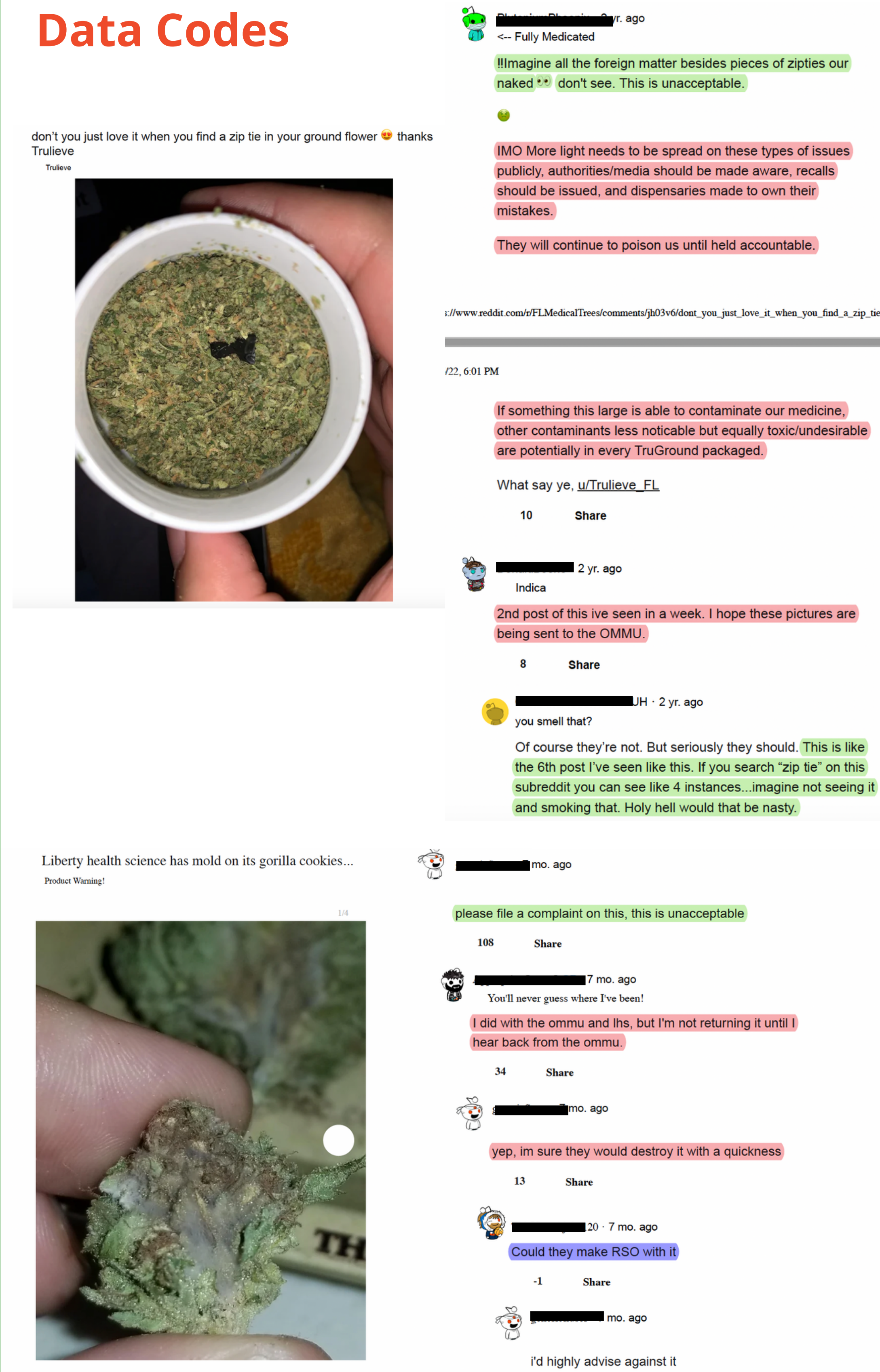
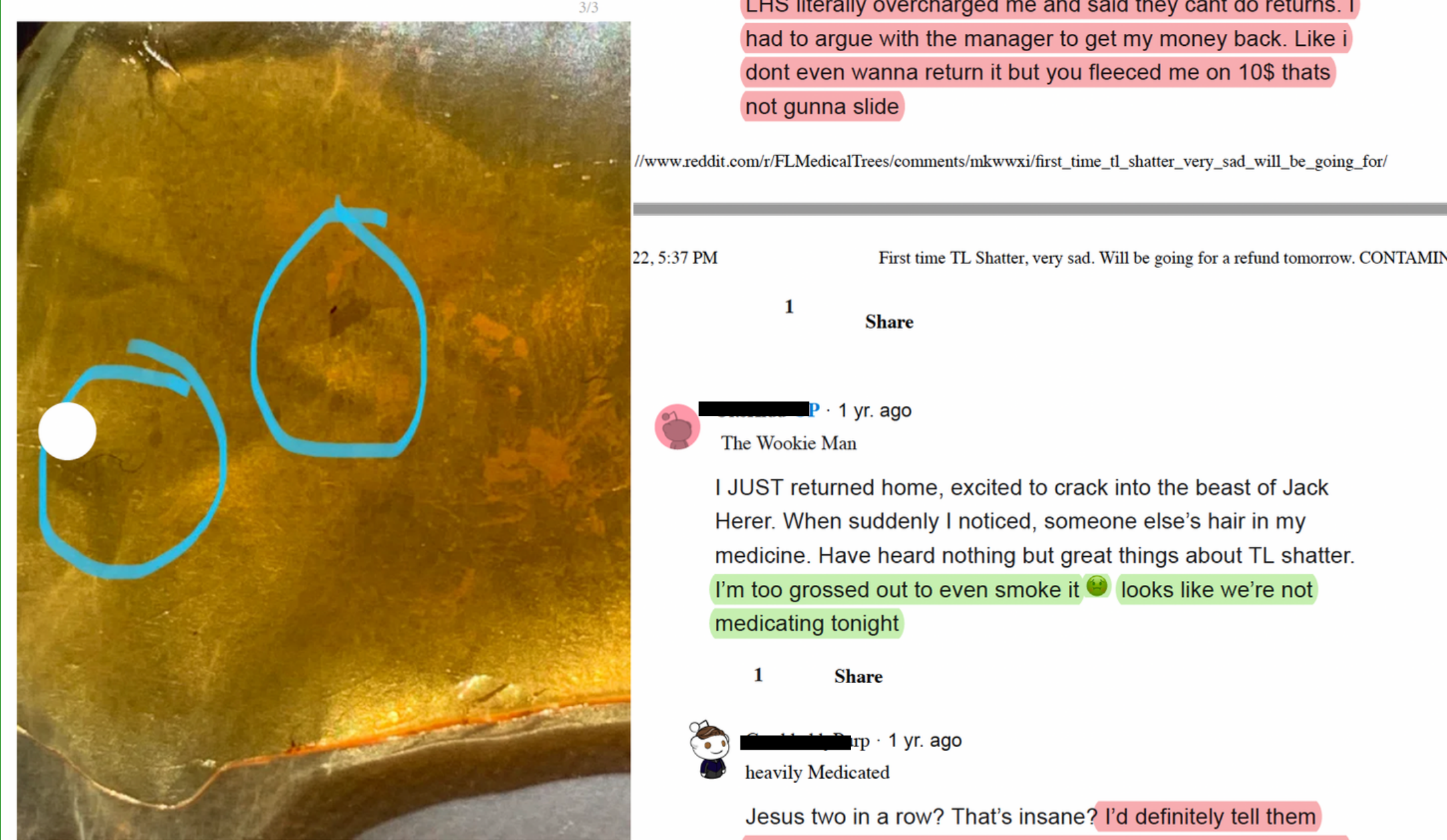


Figure 4: A collage of screenshots from the r/FLMedicalTrees subreddit showing various user comments and photos related to cannabis contamination.



Recommendations

- The state should re-evaluate current regulations and practices to increase oversight of companies operating as medical dispensaries.
- Agricultural best management practices should be put in place at the beginning of the supply chain to reduce contamination.
- Implementation of educational workshops and materials about medical cannabis, possible contaminants, and how to identify them for dispensaries and patients.

