

MARIJUANA FOR ILL IS CURBED BY U.S.

Government Says It Will Not
Supply Patients the Drug
if Another Isn't Tried

WASHINGTON, June 22 (AP) — Expressing concern about a recent surge in applications from ill people, the Government says it will stop approving requests to use marijuana for medical purposes like combating nausea and weight loss in cancer and AIDS patients unless another drug is tried first.

In making the announcement on Friday, the Public Health Service said doctors should first treat their patients with Marinol, a drug containing tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, the active ingredient in marijuana.

"Marijuana impacts not only on the health and clarity of the mind of the individual but can result in harm to others, through secondhand smoke, example and intoxication-caused accidents," the agency said in a statement.

A Longstanding Debate

The Government's action seems certain to add fuel to a longstanding debate about the restrictive nature of its policy on marijuana as a medical tool. The Drug Enforcement Administration has long resisted pressure to reclassify marijuana from a Schedule I drug, which may not be legally prescribed by doctors, to a Schedule II drug, which may be prescribed.

That resistance notwithstanding, pre-rolled cigarettes of marijuana that is grown at a Mississippi research farm of the National Institute on Drug Abuse have been provided for more than a decade to a few patients who successfully applied to the Govern-

ment. But in its announcement on Friday, the Public Health Service said recent publicity that marijuana might curb AIDS patients' loss of appetite had brought a rapid increase in applications to use Government-supplied marijuana.

"Data showing value in AIDS cases has not been forthcoming, however, and there is great concern that the contaminants in natural marijuana might harm these immunity-impaired patients," the service said.

Concern About Perceptions

A spokesman for the agency, Bill Grigg, acknowledged that there was also concern about the signal sent by Government-approved use of marijuana.

"With marijuana use declining," he said, "we don't want to foster a situation in which it appears that the Government is saying that on the other hand it appears safe and effective."

The agency said it would not cut off the supply of marijuana to the 34 people who now have Government permission to use the drug to cope with illnesses that include cancer, glaucoma and AIDS.

But, it said, "physicians applying in the future will be encouraged to obtain THC for their patients."

"P.H.S. believes that whenever possible we should use THC — which is reliable, effective and much less harmful — instead of marijuana," the agency said.

Mr. Grigg said the agency would consider new applications to use marijuana only if the patient had first tried THC.

He said that during the last decade, thousands of cancer patients suffering from nausea during chemotherapy had successfully used THC, which comes in capsules.

Decision Is Attacked

Supporters of medical uses of marijuana attacked the agency's decision, saying that THC would not offer patients the same relief as marijuana and that the agency was being motivated by political considerations.

"Many patients have tried THC and won't accept it as a substitute," said Robert Randall, president of the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics, which works to help seriously ill patients obtain access to marijuana. "It's a wholly political decision that shows a willingness to manipulate the lives of sick people."

Arnold Trebach, president of the Drug Policy Institute, which supports medical uses of marijuana, said the Government was turning its back on sick people because it did not want to look "soft on drugs."

Mr. Trebach called the decision "one of the worst actions I have ever heard taken by a democratic government in the drug war."