

U.S. Rescinds Approval of Marijuana as Therapy

WASHINGTON, March 10 (AP) — The Government said today that it would not provide marijuana for medical purposes to any more patients suffering from AIDS, cancer or glaucoma because it might make them sicker.

The Public Health Service said only 13 people already smoking marijuana legally for medical purposes would be allowed to continue. Those 13 get their supplies from the Federal Government.

Advocates of the medical use of marijuana say it combats the nausea, vomiting and weight loss common to cancer patients, undergoing chemotherapy and to some AIDS sufferers, reduces eye pressure in the treatment of glaucoma and helps reduce muscle spasms common to neurological conditions like multiple sclerosis.

But Bill Grigg, a Public Health Service spokesman, said scientists from the National Institutes of Health had concluded that "existing evidence does not support recommending smoked marijuana as a treatment of choice for any of the medical conditions" of patients who have applied for Government-supplied marijuana.

"The decision was made by the Public Health Service primarily because of fear that the smoked marijuana would be harmful to people with compromised immune systems," he said.

No Public Statement

There was no public announcement of the decision by Dr. James O. Mason, the chief of the health service. Mr. Grigg revealed it in response to a question.

The decision was denounced by people using marijuana for medical purposes and those advocating its use.

"I think it's a decision made by some bozos that don't get their fat duffs out of the office and ask doctors who work with patients like this, talk to the patients who are using it, talk to the

No more Federal supplies of an illegal drug to some ill people.

families and friends that see the difference," said Jim Braun, 44 years old, an AIDS patient in Minneapolis.

Mr. Braun is among 28 patients whose applications for Government-supplied marijuana had been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, but who, as a result of the recent ruling, will not get the drug legally.

Waiting for a Review

Dr. Mason announced last June that until the Government finished a review of marijuana's reported health benefits and potential dangers the health service would stop processing applications and would withhold marijuana from the 28 people who had already applied for it.

That review led Dr. Mason to recommend early this year that no more patients should receive marijuana. The final decision was made last week by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Dr. Louis W. Sullivan.

Instead of marijuana, the Government advocated use of alternative, legal medicines like Marinol, a synthetic form of marijuana's active ingredient. But some patients have said that Marinol, a prescription drug made by Roxane Laboratories Inc. of Columbus, Ohio, does not help them.

"They're giving me a death sentence," said Mr. Braun, who said a few puffs on an illegally acquired marijuana cigarette reduce his nausea and vomiting. He said that in one month when he could not get marijuana his weight dropped to 120 pounds, down 65

to 70 pounds from his normal weight. Mr. Grigg contended that marijuana could be dangerous. "We know that marijuana contains substances which can cause lung problems," he said, "and AIDS patients are prone to pneumonia and other lung infections."

As for eye problems, Mr. Grigg said, "there simply isn't any evidence that with the new drugs that have gone into effect for glaucoma, that smoked marijuana would be any more useful or even as useful as what's already on the market."

But Bob Randall of the Alliance for Cannabis Therapeutics said the decision to withhold Government-supplied marijuana was "a devastating, immoral way to treat seriously ill people, who have legally applied through an established program for care and have been approved to receive such care."

The alliance wants the Drug Enforcement Administration to reclassify marijuana so doctors can prescribe it. That position was supported by an agency administrative law judge several years ago but the agency has resisted changing its position.

During the review of marijuana, officials of the National Institutes of Health called the doctors of the 28 people who had sought and received approval for marijuana but who had not yet gotten the drug to inform them of alternate therapies, Mr. Grigg said. Ten of the applicants later decided not to pursue the marijuana issue, he said. Doctors of the remaining 18 were told on Friday and Monday of Dr. Sullivan's decision.