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[EDITORIAL]

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April 25, 2006

FDA says 'no' to medicinal weed

It is pretty clear marijuana can relieve some symptoms.

The Food and Drug Administration put the kibosh on using marijuana for medical purposes, claiming no studies have found it safe or efficacious in treating many of the disorders its proponents claim it can alleviate. This, of course, undermines several states' laws that have made it legal to use medicinally.

It is true that any drug on the market has gone through rigorous testing to determine its effectiveness and safety for its intended use. Apparently no tests on marijuana have met the standard for the FDA. Unfortunately it is hard to determine whether this conclusion is more political or scientific.

The Web site medicalmarijuanaprocon.org has put together a battery of questions with answers from multiple sources on the pro and con sides. These include medical doctors, lawmakers and advocacy group representatives. The scope of opinions runs the gamut, with medical professionals on both sides of the fence.

It seems clear that smoking marijuana can relieve certain symptoms associated with serious illnesses such as AIDS and cancer treatment.

Long-term side effects exist, however, and this is the main concern of medically minded opponents. It might be that marijuana is appropriate only for terminally ill patients for whom psychological addiction and long-term effects are not relevant issues, but this has yet to be proposed formally.

On the other hand, it is clear much of the opposition is political: Legalizing marijuana, even by prescription, would make it much more accessible to the public, and many say it is a "gateway" drug that encourages users to move on to more harmful illegal drugs. At the same time, this can be true for other legal prescription drugs such as morphine and Vicodin.

In the long run, what is important is using drugs that are safe and effective. If more definitive studies can be completed proving marijuana is safe and effective for the specific conditions for which it is being touted, its proponents will be more successful in making their case.

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