



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Office of the Assistant Secretary
for Health
Washington DC 20201

JUN - 4 1992

Marcia Huffman
210 S. 2nd Street
Calumet, Iowa 51009

Dear Ms. Huffman:

Thank you for your inquiry regarding use of marijuana for therapeutic purposes. Based upon the potential harmful effects to patients and concerns relating to research, marijuana cigarettes will not be available to any new patients through the single-patient IND program.

Clinically, marijuana has many drawbacks. Marijuana is not a pure drug and may be contaminated with pathogens such as mold and fungi. Smoked marijuana delivers irritants that could be highly noxious to patients with chronic illness or immunosuppression. In addition, scientists at the National Institutes of Health have concluded that existing evidence does not support smoked marijuana as the treatment of choice for any medical condition. There are effective and safer alternatives available for all illnesses for which marijuana is being requested.

We are in the process of working with all applicants to explore with them alternatives for management of their patient's illnesses. In this regard, you may be aware that tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the principal active ingredient in marijuana, is available as an oral prescription drug, dronabinol (Marinol). Clinical trials of Marinol treatment for HIV wasting syndrome are almost completed, and NIH is beginning a study of Marinol in combination with megestrol (Megace) for this problem.

In our decision making process, we sought to find a balance between providing everything possible to ease the suffering of chronically ill patients while at the same time adhering to best medical practice. We also had to bear in mind that under existing PHS legislation, we have authority to provide marijuana only for research.

Thank you for your interest and concern.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James O. Mason".

James O. Mason, M.D., Dr.P.H.
Assistant Secretary for Health